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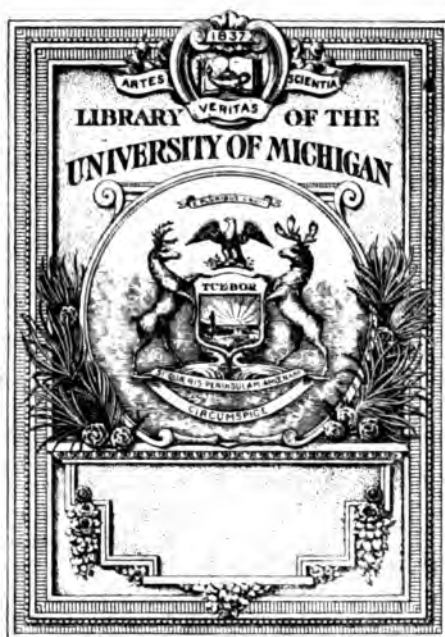
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COURSE OF LECTURES

ON

DRAMATIC ART AND LITERATURE,

BY

AUGUSTUS WILLIAM SCHLEGEL.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL GERMAN

BY

JOHN BLACK.

PHILADELPHIA :

HOGAN & THOMPSON, 139½ MARKET STREET.

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PREFACE OF THE TRANSLATOR.

THE Lectures of A. W. SCHLEGEL on Dramatic Poetry have obtained high celebrity on the Continent, and been much alluded to of late in several publications in this country. The boldness of his attacks on rules which are considered as sacred by the French critics, and on works of which the French nation in general have long been proud, called forth a more than ordinary degree of indignation against his work in France. It was amusing enough to observe the hostility carried on against him in the Parisian Journals. The writers in these Journals found it much easier to condemn M. SCHLEGEL than to refute him: they allowed that what he said was very ingenious, and had a great appearance of truth; but still they said it was not truth. They never however, as far as I could observe, thought proper to grapple with him, to point out anything unfounded in his premises, or illogical in the conclusions which he drew from them: they generally confined themselves to mere assertions, or to minute and unimportant observations by which the real question was in no manner affected.

In this country the work will no doubt meet with a very different reception. Here we have no want of scholars to appreciate the value of his views of the ancient drama; and it will be no disadvantage to him, in our eyes, that he has been unsparing in his attack on the literature of our enemies. It will hardly fail to astonish us, however, to find a stranger better acquainted with the brightest poetical ornament of this country than any of ourselves; and that the admiration of the English nation for Shakspeare should first obtain a truly enlightened interpreter in a critic of Germany.

It is not for me, however, to enlarge on the merits of a work which has already obtained so high a reputation. I shall better consult my own advantage in giving a short extract from the animated account of

M. SCHLEGEL's Lectures in the late work on Germany by Madame de Staël:—

“ W. SCHLEGEL has given a course of Dramatic Literature at Vienna, which comprises everything remarkable that has been composed for the theatre from the time of the Grecians to our own days: it is not a barren nomenclature of the works of the various authors; he seizes the spirit of their different sorts of literature with all the imagination of a poet. We are sensible that to produce such consequences extraordinary studies are required: but learning is not perceived in this work, except by his perfect knowledge of the *chefs-d'œuvre* of composition. In a few pages we reap the fruit of the labour of a whole life; every opinion formed by the author, every epithet given to the writers of whom he speaks, is beautiful and just, concise and animated. He has found the art of treating the finest pieces of poetry as so many wonders of nature, and of painting them in lively colours which do not injure the justness of the outline; for we cannot repeat too often, that imagination, far from being an enemy to truth, brings it forward more than any other faculty of the mind; and all those who depend upon it as an excuse for indefinite terms or exaggerated expressions, are at least as destitute of poetry as of good sense.

“ An analysis of the principles on which both tragedy and comedy are founded, is treated in this course with much depth of philosophy: this kind of merit is often found among the German writers; but SCHLEGEL has no equal in the art of inspiring his own admiration; in general, he shows himself attached to a simple taste, sometimes bordering on rusticity: but he deviates from his usual opinions in favour of the inhabitants of the south. Their play on words is not the object of his censure; he detests the affectation which owes its existence to the spirit of society: but that which is excited by the luxury of imagination pleases him, in poetry, as the profusion of colours and perfumes would do in nature. SCHLEGEL, after having acquired a great reputation by his translation of Shakspeare, became also enamoured of Calderon, but with a very different sort of attachment from that with which Shakspeare had inspired him; for while the English author is deep and gloomy in his knowledge of the human heart, the Spanish poet gives himself up with pleasure and delight to the beauty of life, to the sincerity of faith, and to all the brilliancy of those virtues which derive their colouring from the sunshine of the soul.

"I was at Vienna when W. SCHLEGEL gave his public course of Lectures. I expected only good sense and instruction where the object was merely to convey information: I was astonished to hear a critic as eloquent as an orator, and who, far from falling upon defects, which are the eternal food of mean and little jealousy, sought only the means of reviving a creative genius."

Thus far Mad. de Stael.—In taking upon me to become the interpreter of a work of this description to my countrymen, I am aware that I have incurred no slight degree of responsibility. How I have executed my task it is not for me to speak, but for the reader to judge. This much, however, I will say,—that I have always endeavoured to discover the true meaning of the author, and that I believe I have seldom mistaken it. Those who are best acquainted with the psychological riches of the German language, will be the most disposed to look on my labour with an eye of indulgence.





AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

From the size of the present work, it will not be expected that it should contain either a course of dramatic literature bibliographically complete, or a history of the theatre compiled with antiquarian accuracy. Of books containing dry accounts and lists of names there are already enough. My purpose was to give a general view, and to develop those ideas which ought to guide us in our estimate of the value of the dramatic productions of various ages and nations.

The greatest part of the following Lectures, with the exception of a few observations of a secondary nature, the suggestion of the moment, were delivered orally as they now appear in print. The only alteration consists in a more commodious distribution, and here and there in additions, where the limits of the time prevented me from handling many matters with uniform minuteness. This may afford a compensation for the animation of oral delivery which sometimes throws a veil over deficiencies of expression, and always excites a certain degree of expectation.

I delivered these Lectures, in the spring of 1808, at Vienna, to a brilliant audience of nearly three hundred individuals of both sexes. The inhabitants of Vienna have long been in the habit of refuting the injurious descriptions which many writers of the North of Germany have given of that capital, by the kindest reception of all learned men and artists belonging to those regions, and by the most disinterested warmth which a just sensibility has not been able to cool. I found here the cordiality of better times united with that amiable animation of the South, which is often denied to German seriousness, and the universal diffusion of a keen taste for intellectual entertainment. To this circumstance alone I must attribute it that not a few of the men

who hold the most important places at court, in the state, and in the army, artists and literary men of merit, women of the choicest social cultivation, not merely paid me an occasional visit, but devoted to me an uninterrupted attention.

With joy I seize this fresh opportunity of laying my gratitude at the feet of the benignant monarch who, in the permission to deliver these Lectures communicated to me by way of distinction immediately from his own hand, gave me an honourable testimony of his gracious confidence, which I, as a foreigner who had not the happiness to be born under his sceptre, and merely felt myself bound as a German and a citizen of the world to wish him every blessing and prosperity, could not possibly have merited.

Many enlightened patrons and zealous promoters of everything good and becoming have merited my gratitude for the assistance which they gave to my undertaking, and the encouragement which they afforded me during its execution.

The whole of my auditors rendered my labour extremely agreeable to me by their indulgence, their attentive participation, and their readiness to distinguish, in a feeling manner, every passage which seemed worthy of their applause.

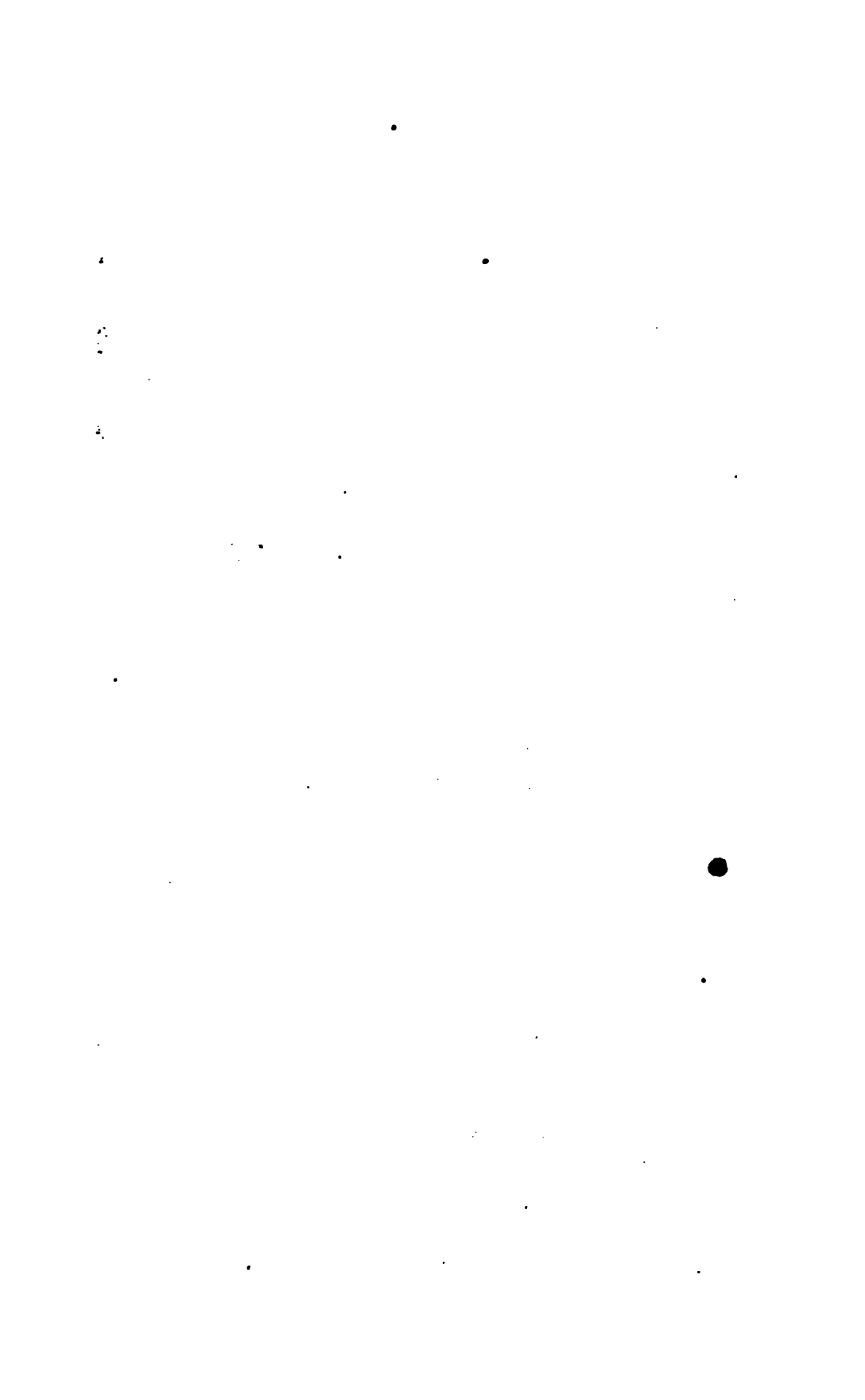
It was a flattering moment for me, which I shall never forget, when, in the last hour, after I had called up recollections of the old German renown sacred to every one possessed of true patriotic sentiment, and when the minds of my auditors were thus more solemnly attuned, I was at last obliged to take my leave powerfully agitated by the reflection that this relation, founded on a common love for a nobler mental cultivation, would be so soon dissolved, and that I should never again see those together who were then assembled around me. A general emotion was perceptible, excited by so much that I could not say, but respecting which our hearts understood each other. In the mental dominion of thought and poetry, inaccessible to worldly power, the Germans, who are separated in so many ways from each other, still feel their unity; and in this feeling, whose interpreter the writer and orator must be, amidst our clouded prospects we may still cherish the elevating presage of the great and immortal calling of our people, who from time immemorial have remained unmixed in their present habitations.

Geneva, February, 1809.

OBSERVATION PREFIXED TO PART OF THE WORK PRINTED IN 1811.

THE declaration in the Preface that these Lectures were, with some additions, printed as they were delivered, is in so far to be corrected, that the additions in the second part are much more considerable than in the first.* The restriction, in point of time in the oral delivery, compelled me to leave more gaps in the last half than in the first. The part respecting Shakspeare and the English theatre, in particular, have been almost altogether re-written. I have been prevented, partly by the want of leisure and partly by the limits of the work, from treating of the Spanish theatre with that fulness which its importance deserves.

* The English edition of this book was printed in two vols., part of the tenth and the concluding Lectures formed the second part.



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LECTURES

ON

DRAMATIC LITERATURE.

LECTURE I.

Introduction—Spirit of true criticism—Difference of taste between the ancients and moderns—Classical and romantic poetry and art—Division of dramatic literature: the ancients, their imitators, and the romantic poets—Definition of the drama—View of the theatres of all nations.

THE object which we propose to ourselves in these Lectures is to investigate the principles of dramatic literature, and to consider whatever is connected with the fable, composition, and representation, of theatrical productions. We have selected the drama in preference to every other department of poetry. It will not be expected of us that we should enter scientifically into the first principles of theory. Poetry is in general closely connected with the other fine arts; and, in some degree, the eldest sister and guide of the rest. The necessity for the fine arts, and the pleasure derivable from them, originate in a principle of our nature, which it is the business of the philosopher to investigate and to classify. This object has given rise to many profound disquisitions, especially in Germany; and the name of *aesthetic** (perceptive) has, with no great degree of propriety, been conferred on this department of philosophy. Aesthetics, or the philosophical theory of beauty and art, is of the utmost importance in its connexion with other inquiries into the human mind; but, considered by itself, it is not of sufficient practical instruction; and it can only become so by its union with the history of the arts. We give the appellation of criticism to the intermediate

* From *AISTHESIS*, *sentiendi vim habens*.—TRANSL.

province between general theory and experience or history. The comparing together and judging the existing productions of the human mind must supply us with a knowledge of the means which are requisite for the conception and execution of masterly works of art.

We will therefore endeavour to throw light on the history of the dramatic art by the torch of criticism. In the course of this attempt it will be necessary to adopt many a proposition, without proof, from general theory; but I hope that the manner in which this shall be done will not be considered as objectionable.

Before I proceed farther, I wish to say a few words respecting the spirit of my criticism, a study to which I have devoted a great part of my life. We see numbers of men, and even whole nations, so much fettered by the habits of their education and modes of living, that they cannot shake themselves free from them, even in the enjoyment of the fine arts. Nothing to them appears natural, proper, or beautiful, which is foreign to their language, their manners, or their social relations. In this exclusive mode of seeing and feeling, it is no doubt possible, by means of cultivation, to attain a great nicety of discrimination in the narrow circle within which they are limited and circumscribed.

But no man can be a true critic or connoisseur who does not possess a universality of mind, who does not possess the flexibility, which, throwing aside all personal predilections and blind habits, enables him to transport himself into the peculiarities of other ages and nations, to feel them as it were from their proper central point; and, what ennobles human nature, to recognize and respect whatever is beautiful and grand under those external modifications which are necessary to their existence, and which sometimes even seem to disguise them. There is no monopoly of poetry for certain ages and nations; and consequently that despotism in taste by which it is attempted to make those rules universal which were at first perhaps arbitrarily established, is a pretension which ought never to be allowed. Poetry, taken in its widest acceptance, as the power of creating what is beautiful, and representing it to the eye or the ear, is a universal gift of Heaven, which even shared to a certain extent by those whom we call barbari and savages. Internal excellence is alone decisive, and when this exists we must not allow ourselves to be repelled by external appearances. Everything must be traced up to the root of existence: if it has sprung from thence, it must possess a doubted worth; but if, without possessing a living germ merely an external appendage, it can never thrive nor acquire proper growth. Many productions which appear at first dazzling phenomena in the province of the fine arts, are

as a whole have been honoured with the appellation of works of a golden age, resemble the mimic gardens of children: impatient to witness the work of their hands they break off here and there branches and flowers, and plant them in the earth; everything at first assumes a noble appearance; the childish gardener struts proudly up and down among his elegant beds, till the rootless plants begin to droop, and hang down their withered leaves and flowers, and nothing soon remains but the bare twigs, while the dark forest, on which no art or care was ever bestowed, and which towered up towards heaven long before human remembrance, bears every blast unshaken, and fills the solitary beholder with religious awe.

Let us now think of applying the idea which we have been developing, of the universality of true criticism; to the history of poetry and the fine arts. We generally limit it, (although there may be much which deserves to be known beyond this circle) as we limit what we call universal history to whatever has had a nearer or more remote influence on the present cultivation of Europe: consequently to the works of the Greeks and Romans, and of those of the modern European nations, who first and chiefly distinguished themselves in art and literature. It is well known that, three centuries and a half ago, the study of ancient literature, by the diffusion of the Grecian language, (for the Latin was never extinct,) received a new life: the classical authors were sought after with avidity, and made accessible by means of the press; and the monuments of ancient art were carefully dug up and preserved. All this excited the human mind in a powerful manner, and formed a decided epoch in the history of our cultivation; the fruits have extended to our times, and will extend to a period beyond the power of our calculation. But the study of the ancients was immediately carried to a most pernicious extent. The learned, who were chiefly in the possession of this knowledge, and who were incapable of distinguishing themselves by their own productions, yielded an unlimited deference to the ancients, and with great appearance of reason, as they are models in their kind. They maintained that nothing could be hoped for the human mind but in the imitation of the ancients; and they only esteemed in the works of the moderns whatever resembled, or seemed to bear a resemblance to, those of antiquity. Everything else was rejected by them as barbarous and unnatural. It was quite otherwise with the great poets and artists. However strong their enthusiasm for the ancients, and however determined their purpose of entering into competition with them, they were compelled by the characteristic peculiarity of their minds, to

proceed in a track of their own, and to impress upon their productions the stamp of their own genius. Such was the case with Dante among the Italians, the father of modern poetry; he acknowledged Virgil for his instructor, but produced a work which, of all others, differs the most from the *Æneid*, and far excels it in our opinion, in strength, truth, depth, and comprehension. It was the same afterwards with Ariosto, who has most unaccountably been compared to Homer; for nothing can be more unlike. It was the same in the fine arts with Michael Angelo and Raphael, who were without doubt well acquainted with the antique. When we ground our judgment of modern painters merely on their resemblance of the ancients, we must necessarily be unjust towards them; and hence Winkelmann has undoubtedly been guilty of injustice to Raphael. As the poets for the most part acquiesced in the doctrines of the learned, we may observe a curious struggle in them between their natural inclination and their imagined duty. When they sacrificed to the latter they were praised by the learned; but by yielding to their own inclinations they became the favourites of the people. What preserves the heroic poems of a Tasso and a Camoëns to this day alive, in the hearts and on the lips of their countrymen, is by no means their imperfect resemblance to Virgil, or even to Homer, but in Tasso the tender feeling of chivalrous love and honour, and in Camoëns the glowing inspiration of patriotic heroism.

Those very ages, nations, and classes, that were least in want of a poetry of their own, were the most assiduous in their imitation of the ancients. Hence the dull scholastic exercises which could at most excite a cold admiration. But, in the fine arts, mere imitation is always fruitless; what we borrow from others must be again as it were born in us, to produce a poetical effect. Of what avail is all foreign imitation? Art cannot exist without nature, and man can give nothing to his fellow men but himself.

The genuine followers of the ancients, those who attempted to rival them, who from a similarity of disposition and cultivation proceeded in their track, and acted in their spirit, were at all times as few as their mechanical spiritless imitators were numerous. The great body of critics, seduced by external appearance have been always but too indulgent even to these imitators. They held them up as correct modern classics, while those armed poets, who had become the favourites of their respective nations, and to whose sublimity it was impossible to be altogether blind, were at most but tolerated by them as rude and w natural geniuses. But the unqualified separation of genius

taste which they assume is altogether untenable. Genius is the almost unconscious choice of the highest degree of excellence, and consequently it is taste in its greatest perfection.

In this state, nearly, matters continued till a period not far back, when several inquiring minds, chiefly Germans, endeavoured to clear up the misconception, and to hold the ancients in proper estimation, without being insensible to the merits of the moderns of a totally different description. The apparent contradiction did not intimidate them.—The groundwork of human nature is no doubt everywhere the same; but in all our investigations we may observe that there is no fundamental power throughout the whole range of nature so simple, but that it is capable of dividing and diverging into opposite directions. The whole play of living motion hinges on harmony and contrast. Why then should not this phenomenon be repeated in the history of man? This idea led, perhaps, to the discovery of the true key to the ancient and modern history of poetry and the fine arts. Those who adopted it gave to the peculiar spirit of modern art, as opposed to the *antique* or *classical*, the name of *romantic*. The appellation is certainly not unsuitable: the word is derived from *romance*, the name of the language of the people which was formed from the mixture of Latin and Teutonic, in the same manner as modern cultivation is the fruit of the union of the peculiarities of the northern nations with the fragments of antiquity. Hence the cultivation of the ancients was much more of a piece than ours.

The distinction which we have just stated can hardly fail to appear well founded, if it can be shown that the same contrast in the labours of the ancients and moderns runs symmetrically, I might almost say systematically, throughout every branch of art, as far as our knowledge of antiquity extends; that it is as evident in music and the plastic arts as in poetry. This proposition still remains to be demonstrated in its full extent, though we have many excellent observations on different parts of the subject.

Among the foreign authors who wrote before this school can be said to have been formed in Germany, we may mention Rousseau, who acknowledged the contrast in music, and demonstrated that rhythmus and melody constituted the prevailing principle of the ancients, and harmony that of the moderns. In his prejudices against harmony, however, we altogether differ from him. On the subject of the plastic arts an ingenious observation was made by Hemsterhuys, that the ancient painters were probably too much sculptors, and that the modern sculptors are too much painters. This is the exact point of difference; for I shall dis-

tinently show, in the sequel, that the spirit of ancient art and poetry is *plastic*, and that of the moderns *picturesque*.

By an example taken from another art, that of architecture, I shall endeavour to illustrate what I mean by this contrast. In the middle ages there prevailed a style of architecture, which, in the last centuries especially, was carried to the utmost degree of perfection; and which, whether justly or unjustly, has been called Gothic architecture. When, on the general revival of classical antiquity, the imitation of Grecian architecture became prevalent, and but too frequently without a due regard to the difference of climate and manners and the destination of the structure, the zealots of this new taste passed a sweeping sentence of condemnation on the Gothic, which they reprobated as tasteless, gloomy, and barbarous. This was in some degree pardonable in the Italians, among whom a love for ancient architecture, from the remains of classical edifices which they inherited, and the similarity of their climate to that of the Greeks, might in some sort be said to be innate. But with us, inhabitants of the North, the first powerful impression on entering a Gothic cathedral is not so easily eradicated. We feel, on the contrary, a strong desire to investigate and to justify the source of this impression. A very slight attention will convince us, that the Gothic architecture not only displays an extraordinary degree of mechanical dexterity, but also an astonishing power of invention; and, on a closer examination, we become impressed with the strongest conviction of its profound character, and of its constituting a full and perfect system in itself, as well as the Grecian.

To the application!—The Pantheon is not more different from Westminster Abbey or the church of St. Stephen at Vienna, than the structure of a tragedy of Sophocles from a drama of Shakspeare. The comparison between these wonderful productions of poetry and architecture might be carried still farther. But does our admiration of the one compel us to depreciate the other? May we not admit that each is great and admirable in its kind although the one is, and ought to be, different from the other? The experiment is worth attempting. We will quarrel with no man for his predilection either for the Grecian or the Gothic. The world is wide, and affords room for a great diversity of objects. Narrow and exclusive prepossessions will never constitute a genuine critic or connoisseur, who ought, on the contrary, to possess the power of elevating himself above all partial views and of subduing all personal inclinations.

For the justification of our object, namely, the grand division which we lay down in the history of art, and according to w

we conceive ourselves equally warranted in establishing the same division in dramatic literature, it might be sufficient merely to have stated this contrast between the ancient, or classical, and the romantic. But as there are exclusive admirers of the ancients, who never cease asserting that all deviation from them is merely the whim of recent critics, who express themselves on the subject in a language full of mystery, but cautiously avoid conveying their sentiments in a tangible shape, I shall endeavour to explain the origin and spirit of the *romantic*, and then leave the world to judge if the use of the word, and of the idea which it is intended to convey, are sufficiently justified.

The formation* of the Greeks was a natural education in its utmost perfection. Of a beautiful and noble race, endowed with susceptible senses and a clear understanding, placed beneath a mild heaven, they lived and bloomed in the full health of existence; and, under a singular coincidence of favourable circumstances, performed all of which our circumscribed nature is capable. The whole of their art and their poetry is expressive of the consciousness of this harmony of all their faculties. They have invented the poetry of gladness.

Their religion was the deification of the powers of nature and of the earthly life: but this worship, which, among other nations, clouded the imagination with images of horror, and filled the heart with unrelenting cruelty, assumed, among the Greeks, a mild, a grand, and a dignified form. Superstition, too often the tyrant of the human faculties, seemed to have here contributed to their freest developement. It cherished the arts by which it was ornamented, and the idols became models of ideal beauty.

But however far the Greeks may have carried beauty, and even morality, we cannot allow any higher character to their formation than that of a *refined* and ennobled sensuality. Let it not be understood that I assert this to be true in every instance. The conjectures of a few philosophers, and the irradiations of poetical inspiration, constitute an exception. Man can never altogether turn aside his thoughts from infinity, and some obscure recollections will always remind him of his original home; but we are now speaking of the principal object towards which his endeavours are directed.

Religion is the root of human existence. Were it possible for man to renounce all religion, including that of which he is unconscious, and over which he has no control, he would become a mere surface without any internal substance. When this cen-

* *Bildung* in the original. *Formation* is hardly used in this sense in English; but I know no single English word which approaches nearer to it. *Bilden* in German is synonymous with the Greek *παιδεύω*.—TRANS.

tre is disturbed, the whole system of the mental faculties must receive another direction.

And this is what has actually taken place in modern Europe through the introduction of Christianity. This sublime and beneficent religion has regenerated the ancient world from its state of exhaustion and debasement; it has become the guiding principle in the history of modern nations, and **even** at this day, when many suppose they have shaken off its authority, they will find themselves in all human affairs much more under its influence than they themselves are aware.

After Christianity, the character of Europe, since the commencement of the middle ages, has been chiefly influenced by the Germanic race of northern conquerors, who infused new life and vigour into a degenerated people. The stern nature of the north drives man back within himself; and what is withdrawn from the free developement of the senses, must, in noble dispositions, be added to their earnestness of mind. Hence the honest cordiality with which Christianity was received by all the Teutonic tribes, in whom it penetrated more deeply, displayed more powerful effects, and became more interwoven with all human feelings, than in the case of any other people.

From a union of the rough but honest heroism of the northern conquerors and the sentiments of Christianity, chivalry had its origin, of which the object was, by holy and respected vows, to guard those who bore arms from every rude and ungenerous abuse of strength, into which it was so easy to deviate.

With the virtues of chivalry was associated a new and purer spirit of love, an inspired homage for genuine female worth, which was now revered as the pinnacle of humanity; and, enjoined by religion itself under the image of a virgin mother, infused into all hearts a sentiment of unalloyed goodness.

As Christianity was not, like the heathen worship, satisfied with certain external acts, but claimed a dominion over the whole inward man and the most hidden movements of the heart; the feeling of moral independence was in like manner preserved alive by the laws of honour, a worldly morality, as it were, which was often a variance with the religious, yet in so far resembled it, that it never calculated consequences, but consecrated unconditionally certain principles of action, as truths elevated beyond all the investigation of casuistical reasoning.

Chivalry, love, and honour, with religion itself, are the objects of the natural poetry which poured itself out in the middle ages with incredible fulness, and preceded the more artificial formation of the romantic character. This age had also its mythology, consisting of chivalrous tales and legends; but their wonders and

their heroism were the very reverse of those of the ancient mythology.

Several inquirers, who, in other respects, entertain the same conception of the peculiarities of the moderns, and trace them to the same source that we do, have placed the essence of the northern poetry in melancholy; and to this when properly understood, we have nothing to object.

Among the Greeks human nature was in itself all-sufficient; they were conscious of no wants, and aspired at no higher perfection than that which they could actually attain by the exercise of their own faculties. We, however, are taught by superior wisdom that man, through a high offence, forfeited the place for which he was originally destined; and that the whole object of his earthly existence is to strive to regain that situation, which, if left to his own strength, he could never accomplish. The religion of the senses had only in view the possession of outward and perishable blessings; and immortality, in so far as it was believed, appeared in an obscure distance like a shadow, a faint dream of this bright and vivid futurity. The very reverse of all this is the case with the Christian: everything finite and mortal is lost in the contemplation of infinity; life has become a shadow and darkness, and the first dawning of our real existence opens in the world beyond the grave. Such a religion must waken the foreboding, which slumbers in every feeling heart, to the most thorough consciousness, that the happiness after which we strive we can never here attain; that no external object can ever entirely fill our souls; and that every mortal enjoyment is but a fleeting and momentary deception. When the soul, resting as it were under the willows of exile,* breathes out its longing for its distant home, the prevailing character of its songs must be melancholy. Hence the poetry of the ancients was the poetry of enjoyment, and ours is that of desire: the former has its foundation in the scene which is present, while the latter hovers betwixt recollection and hope. Let me not be understood to affirm that everything flows in one strain of wailing and complaint, and that the voice of melancholy must always be loudly heard. As the austerity of tragedy was not incompatible with the joyous views of the Greeks, so the romantic poetry can assume every tone, even that of the most lively gladness; but still it will always, in some shape or other, bear traces of the source from which it originated. The feeling of the moderns is, upon the whole, more intense, their fancy more incorporeal, and their thoughts more

* *Trauerweiden der verbannung*, literally, *the weeping willows of banishment*; an allusion, as every reader must know, to the 137th Psalm. Linneus, from this Psalm, calls the weeping willow *Salix Babylonica*.—TRANS.

contemplative. In nature, it is true, the boundaries of objects run more into one another, and things are not so distinctly separated as we must exhibit them for the sake of producing a distinct impression.

The Grecian idea of humanity consisted in a perfect concord and proportion between all the powers,—a natural harmony. The moderns again have arrived at the consciousness of the internal discord which renders such an idea impossible; and hence the endeavour of their poetry is to reconcile these two worlds between which we find ourselves divided, and to melt them indissolubly into one another. The impressions of the senses are consecrated, as it were, from their mysterious connexion with higher feelings; and the soul, on the other hand, embodies its forebodings, or nameless visions of infinity, in the phenomena of the senses.

In the Grecian art and poetry we find an original and unconscious unity of form and subject; in the modern, so far as it has remained true to its own spirit, we observe a keen struggle to unite the two, as being naturally in opposition to each other. The Grecian executed what it proposed in the utmost perfection; but the modern can only do justice to its endeavours after what is infinite by approximation; and, from a certain appearance of imperfection, is in greater danger of not being duly appreciated.

It would lead us too far, if in the separate arts of architecture, music, and painting, (for the moderns have never had a sculpture of their own,) we should endeavour to point out the distinctions which we have here announced, to show the contrast observable in the character of the same arts among the ancients, and thoroughly to investigate and demonstrate their kindred aim.

Neither can we here enter into a more particular consideration of the different kinds and forms of the romantic poetry, but must return to our object, which is dramatic literature. Its division as in the other departments of art, into the antique and the romantic, will point out to us the course which we have to pursue.

We shall begin with the ancients; then proceed to their imitators, genuine or supposed successors among the moderns; and lastly, we shall consider those poets of latter times, who, either disregarding the classical models, or purposely deviating from them, have proceeded in a path of their own.

Of the ancient dramatists the Greeks can alone be considered as important. The Romans were in this branch at first translators of the Greeks, and afterwards imitators, and not always successful imitators. Besides much less of them has been preserved. Among the modern nations an endeavour to restore the ancient stage, and, if possible, to perfect it, has been displa

a very conspicuous manner by the Italians and the French. In other nations, also, more or less, especially of late, attempts of the same kind have at times been made in tragedy; for in comedy, the form under which it appears in Plautus and Terence has certainly been more prevalent. Of all the studied imitations of the ancient tragedy the French is that which is the most splendid, which has acquired the greatest renown, and which, consequently, deserves the most attentive investigation. After the French come the modern Italians; viz. Metastasio and Alfieri. The native countries of the romantic drama, which strictly speaking, can neither be called tragedy nor comedy in the sense of the ancients, are England and Spain. It began to flourish at the same time in both, somewhat more than two hundred years ago, through Shakspeare and Lope de Vega.

The German stage is the last of all, and has been influenced in the greatest variety of ways by all those which preceded it. It will be proper therefore also to enter last upon its consideration. By this means we shall be better enabled to decide with respect to the directions which it has hitherto taken, and to point out the prospects which are still open to it.

When I promise to go through the history of the Greek and Roman, of the Italian and French, and of the English and Spanish Theatres, in the few hours which are dedicated to these Lectures, I wish it to be understood that I can only enter into such an account of them, as will comprehend their most essential peculiarities under general points of view. Although I confine myself to one branch of poetry, the mass of materials comprehended within that branch is too extensive to be taken in by the eye at once, and this would be the case, were I even to limit myself to one of its subordinate departments. We might read ourselves to death with farces. In the ordinary histories of literature the poets of one language, and one description, are enumerated in succession, without any discrimination, like so many Assyrian and Egyptian Kings in the ancient universal history. There are persons who have an unconquerable passion for the titles of books, and we willingly concede to them the privilege of increasing their number by books on the titles of books. It is much the same thing, however, as in the history of a war to give the name of every soldier who fought in the files of the hostile armies. We speak only of the generals, and those who performed actions of distinction. In like manner the battles of the human mind, if I may use the expression, have been won by a few intellectual heroes. The history of the developement of art and its various forms may be therefore exhibited in the characteristic

view of a number, by no means considerable, of elevated and creative minds.

Before, however, entering upon such a history as we have now described, it will be previously necessary to consider what is meant by *dramatic, theatrical, tragic* and *comic*.

What is dramatic? To many the answer will seem very easy: where various persons are introduced conversing together, and the poet does not speak in his own person. This is, however, merely the first external foundation of the form; it is dialogue. When the characters deliver thoughts and sentiments opposed to each other, but which operate no change, and which leave the minds of both in exactly the same state in which they were at the commencement; the conversation may indeed be deserving of attention, but can be productive of no dramatic interest. I shall make this clear by alluding to a more tranquil species of dialogue, not adapted for the stage, the philosophic. When, in Plato, Socrates asks the conceited sophist Hippias, what is the meaning of the beautiful, the latter is at once ready with a superficial answer, but is afterwards compelled by the disguised attacks of Socrates to give up his former definition, and to grope about him for other ideas, till, ashamed at last and irritated at the superiority of the sage who has convicted him of his ignorance, he is reduced to quit the field; this dialogue is not merely philosophically instructive, but arrests the attention like a little drama. And therefore this animation in the progress of the thoughts, the anxiety with which we look to the result, in a word, the dramatic nature of the dialogues of Plato has always been very justly celebrated.

From this we may conceive the great charm of dramatic poetry. Action is the true enjoyment of life, nay, life itself. Mere passive enjoyments may lull us into a state of obtuse satisfaction, but even then, when possessed of internal activity, we cannot avoid being soon wearied. The great bulk of mankind are merely from their incapacity for uncommon exertions, confined within a narrow circle of insignificant operations. Their days flow on in succession according to the drowsy laws of custom, their life is imperceptible in its progress, and the bursting torrent of the first passions of youth soon settles into a stagnant marsh. From the discontent which they feel with their situation they are compelled to have recourse to all sorts of diversions, which uniformly consist in a species of occupation that may be renounced at pleasure and though a struggle with difficulties, yet with difficulties that are easily surmounted. But of all diversions the theatre is undoubtedly the most entertaining. We see important act when we cannot act importantly ourselves. The highest ot

of human activity is man, and in the drama we see men, from motives of friendship or hostility, measure their powers with each other, influence each other as intellectual and moral beings by their thoughts, sentiments, and passions, and decidedly determine their reciprocal relations. The art of the poet is to separate from the fable whatever does not essentially belong to it, whatever, in the daily necessities of real life, and the petty occupations to which they give rise, interrupts the progress of important actions, and to concentrate within a narrow space a number of events calculated to fill the minds of the hearers with attention and expectation. In this manner it affords us a renovated picture of life; a compendium of whatever is animated and interesting in human existence.

This is not all.—Even in a lively verbal relation, it is frequently customary to introduce persons in conversation with each other, and to give a corresponding variety to the tone and language. But the gaps, which these conversations still leave in the story, are filled up with a description of the accompanying circumstances, or other particulars, by the person who relates in his own name. The dramatic poet must renounce all such assistance; but for this he is richly recompensed in the following invention. He requires each of the characters in his action to be represented by a real person; that this person in size, age, and figure, should resemble as much as possible the ideas which we are to form of his imaginary being, and even assume every peculiarity by which that being is distinguished; that every speech should be delivered in a suitable tone of voice, and accompanied by corresponding looks and motions; and that those external circumstances should be added which are necessary to give the hearers a clear idea of what is going forward. Moreover these representations of the creatures of his imagination must appear in the costume suitable to their assumed rank, age, and country; partly that they may bear a greater resemblance to them, and partly because there is something characteristic even in the dresses. Lastly, he must see them surrounded by a place which in some degree resembles that where, according to his fable, the action took place, because this also contributes to the resemblance: he places them on a scene. All this brings us to the idea of the *theatre*. It is evident that in the form of dramatic poetry, that is, in the representation of an action by dialogue without any relation, the ingredient of a theatre is essentially necessary. We allow that there are dramatic works which were not originally destined by their authors for the stage, and which would not produce any great effect on it, that still afford great pleasure in the perusal. I am however very much inclined to doubt whether they would produce the same strong impression upon a person

who had never seen a play, and never heard a description of one, which they do upon us. We are accustomed, in reading dramatic works, to supply the representation ourselves.

The invention of the dramatic art, and that of a theatre, seem to lie very near one another. Man has a great disposition to mimicry; when he enters vividly into the situation, sentiments, and passions of others, he even involuntarily puts on a resemblance to them in his gestures. Children are perpetually going out of themselves; it is one of their chief amusements to represent those grown people whom they have had an opportunity of observing, or whatever comes in their way; and with the happy flexibility of their imagination, they can exhibit all the characteristics of assumed dignity in a father, a schoolmaster, or a king. The sole step which is requisite for the invention of a drama, namely, the separating and extracting the mimetic elements and fragments from social life, and representing them collected together into one mass, has not however been taken in many nations. In the very minute description of ancient Egypt in Herodotus and other writers, I do not recollect observing the smallest trace of it. The Etrurians again, who in many respects resembled the Egyptians, had their theatrical representations; and, what is singular enough, the Etruscan name for an actor, *histrio*, is preserved in living languages down to the present day. The Arabians and Persians, though possessed of a rich poetical literature, are unacquainted with any sort of drama. It was the same with Europe in the middle ages. On the introduction of Christianity, the plays handed down among the Greeks and Romans were abolished, partly from their reference to heathen ideas, and partly because they had degenerated into the most impudent and indecent immorality; and they were not again revived till after the lapse of nearly a thousand years. Even in the fourteenth century we do not find in Boccaccio, who, however, gives us a most accurate picture of the whole constitution of social life, the smallest trace of plays. In place of them they had then only story-tellers, minstrels, and jugglers, (*conteurs, menestriers, jongleurs*). On the other hand we are by no means entitled to assume, that the invention of the drama has only once taken place in the world, and that it has always been borrowed by one people from another. The English navigators mention that among the islanders of the South Seas, who in every mental qualification and acquirement are in such a low scale of civilization, they yet observed a rude drama, in which a common event in life was imitated for the sake of diversion. And to go to the other extreme: among the Indians, the people from whom perhaps the cultivation of the human race has been derived, plays were

known long before they could have experienced any foreign influence. It has lately been made known to Europe, that they have a rich dramatic literature, which ascends back for more than two thousand years. The only specimen of their plays (nataks) hitherto known to us is the delightful Sakontala, which, notwithstanding the colouring of a foreign climate, bears in its general structure such a striking resemblance to our romantic drama, that we might be inclined to suspect we owe this resemblance to the predilection for Shakspeare entertained by Jones the English translator, if his fidelity were not confirmed by other learned orientalists. In the golden times of India, the representation of this nataks served to delight the splendid Imperial court of Delhi; but it would appear that, from the misery of numberless oppressions, the dramatic art in that country is now entirely at an end. The Chinese again have their standing national theatre, stationary perhaps in every sense of the word; and I do not doubt that, in the establishment of arbitrary rules, and the delicate observance of insignificant points of decorum, they leave the most correct Europeans very far behind them. When the new European stage in the fifteenth century had its origin in the allegorical and spiritual pieces called Moralities and Mysteries, this origin was not owing to the influence of the ancient dramatists, who did not come into circulation till some time afterwards. In those rude beginnings lay the germ of the romantic drama as a peculiar invention.

In this wide extent of theatrical entertainments, we may again remark how great the distance in dramatic talent between nations equally distinguished for intellect; so that theatrical talent, which is essentially different from a poetical gift in general, seems also to have this specific peculiarity. We are not to wonder at the contrast between the Greeks and Romans, for the Greeks were altogether a nation devoted to art, and the Romans a practical people. Among the latter the fine arts were introduced as a luxury, calculated to produce corruption and degeneracy. They carried this luxury so far with respect to the theatre itself, that the perfection of the essential part of the performance was soon forgot in the immensity of the decorations. Even among the Greeks the dramatic art was far from general. The theatre was invented in Athens, and in Athens alone it was carried to perfection. The Doric dramas of Epicharmus form only a slight exception. All the great creative dramatists of the Greeks were born and formed in Attica. Throughout the whole extent of the Grecian nation, with whatever success the fine arts were almost everywhere practised, in all other places but Athens they could only admire the productions of the Attic stage, without being able to rival them.

The difference in this respect is astonishing between the Spaniards and their neighbours the Portuguese, related to them by descent and by language. The Spaniards possess a dramatic literature of inexhaustible wealth; their dramatists in fertility resemble the Greeks, of whom more than a hundred pieces can frequently be named. Whatever judgment in other respects may be pronounced on their merits, the praise of invention has never yet been denied to them; this has in fact been but too well ascertained, as Italians, French, and English have all availed themselves of the ingenious inventions of the Spaniards, and often without pointing out the source from which they derived them. The Portuguese again, who in other branches of poetry rival the Spaniards, have hardly done anything in this department, and have never even had a national theatre; they were from time to time visited by strolling Spanish players; and they chose rather to listen to a foreign dialect, which if not taught them they could not always understand, than to invent, or at least to translate and imitate, for themselves.

Among the many talents for art and literature displayed by the Italians, the dramatic is by no means pre-eminent, and this defect they would almost seem to have inherited from the Romans, in the same manner as their great talent for mimicry and buffoonery ascends back to the most ancient times. The extemporary compositions called *Fabulæ Atellanæ*, the only original and national dramatic form of the Romans, in respect of plan, were not perhaps more perfect than what is called the *Commedia dell'Arte*, or extemporary comedy with masks. In the ancient Saturnalia we have probably the germ of the present carnival, which is entirely an Italian invention. The opera and ballet were also the invention of the Italians: a species of theatrical amusements, in which the dramatic interest is entirely subordinate to music and dancing.

If the German genius has not developed itself with the same fulness and ease in the dramatic branch as in other departments of literature, this deficiency arises perhaps from the peculiar character of the nation. The Germans are a speculative people, that is, a people who wish to become acquainted with the principle of whatever they are engaged in by reflection and meditation. On that very account they are not sufficiently practical; for if we wish to act with dexterity, vigour, and determination, we must some time or other believe that we have become masters of our subject, and not to be perpetually returning to demonstrate its theory; we must even have settled ourselves into a certain partiality of idea. In the invention and conduct of a drama the practical spirit must prevail: the dramatic poet is not allowed to

dream that he is inspired, he must go the straightest way to his object; and the Germans are but too apt to lose sight of their object in the course of their way to it. Besides, in the drama the national features must be marked in the most prominent manner, and the national character of the Germans is modest and averse to everything like pretension; and the noble endeavour to become acquainted with, and to appropriate to ourselves whatever is excellent in others, is not seldom accompanied with the undervaluing our own worth. Hence our stage has often, in form and subject, been under more than a due degree of foreign influence.

• Our object is not, however, the mere passive repetition of the Greek or French, the Spanish or English theatres; but we seek, as it appears to me, a form which contains whatever is truly poetical in all these theatres, with the exception of what is founded in local circumstances; in the subject, however, the German national features ought certainly to predominate.

LECTURE II.

**Theatrical effect—Importance of the stage. Principal species of the drama—
Essence of tragedy and comedy—Seriousness and mirth—How far it is possible to become acquainted with the ancients without knowing the original languages—Winkelman.**

AFTER this rapid view of what may be called the map of dramatic literature, we return to the examination of the principal idea. We have already shown that the supposition of a visible representation is essential to the dramatic form; and a dramatic work can therefore be considered in a double point of view, how far it is *poetical*, and how far it is *theatrical*. The two are by no means inseparable. I do not mean the poetical expression: I am not now considering the versification and the ornaments of language, though without a higher merit these are the least essential parts of theatrical works, but the poetry in the spirit and plan of a piece; and this may exist in a high degree, when it is even written in prose. How does a drama become poetical? Most assuredly in the very same way as works in other branches become so. It must in the first place be a connected whole, and complete within itself. But this is merely the negative condition of the form of a work of art, by which it is distinguished from the phenomena of nature, which flow into one another, and do not possess an independent existence. To be poetical it is necessary that it should be a mirror of ideas, that is, thoughts and feelings in their character necessary and eternally true, which soar above this earthly life, and that it should exhibit them embodied before us. The ideas which in this view are essential to the different departments of the drama will hereafter be the object of our investigation. We shall also, by way of contrast, show that without them a drama becomes altogether prosaic and empirical, that is, composed by the understanding from the observation of reality.

But how does a dramatic work become theatrical, or fitted to appear with advantage on the stage? It is often difficult in a single instance to determine whether it may possess such a property or not.—This is frequently the subject of great controversy, especially when the self-love of authors and players comes into collision; the one throws the blame of the failure on the other, and those who advocate the cause of the author complain of the inadequacy of the representation, and the insufficiency of the means afforded to do justice to his conceptions.—But in general

the answer to this question is by no means so difficult. The object proposed is to produce an impression on an assembled crowd, to gain their attention, and to excite in them an interest and participation. This part of his business is common to the poet with the orator. How does the latter attain his end? By perspicuity, celerity, and force. Whatever exceeds the ordinary measure of patience or comprehension must be carefully avoided by him. Moreover, a number of men assembled together constitute an object of distraction to one another, if their eyes and ears are not directed to a common object beyond their circle. Hence the dramatic poet, as well as the orator, must at the very commencement produce such a strong impression as to draw his hearers from themselves, and become masters, as it were, of their bodily attention. There is a species of poetry capable of producing a soft emotion in a mind turned to solitary contemplation, as the gentle breezes draw forth accordant sounds from an Æolian harp. However excellent this poetry may be in itself, without some other accompaniment its tones would be lost on the stage. The melting *harmonica* is not calculated to regulate the march of an army, and kindle its military enthusiasm. For this we must have piercing instruments, but above all a decided *rhythmus*, to quicken the pulsation and give a more rapid motion to the senses. The grand requisite in a drama is to make this *rhythmus* visible in its progress. When this has once been effected, the poet may the sooner halt in his rapid career, and indulge his own inclinations. There are points, when the most simple or artless tale, the inspired lyric, the most profound thoughts, and remote allusions, the smartest coruscations of wit, and the most dazzling flights of a sportive or ethereal fancy, are all in their place, and when the willing audience, even those who cannot entirely comprehend them, follow the whole with a greedy ear, like a music in harmony with their feelings. The great art of the poet is to avail himself of the effect of contrasts, wherever he can, to exhibit at times, in as clear a manner, a quiet stillness, the musings of self contemplation, and even the indolent resignation of exhausted nature, as at other times the most tumultuous emotions, the most raging storm of the passions. With respect to the theatrical, however, we must never forget that much must be suited to the capacities and inclinations of the audience, and consequently to the national character in general, and the particular degree of civilization. Dramatic poetry is in a certain sense the most worldly of all, for from the stillness of an inspired mind, it exhibits itself in the midst of the noise and tumult of social life. The dramatic poet is, more than any other, obliged to court external favour for applause. But he ought to lower himself only

in appearance to his hearers; in reality, however, elevate them to himself.

In producing an impression on an assembled multitude, the following circumstance deserves to be weighed, that the whole amount of its importance may be ascertained. In ordinary intercourse men exhibit only their exteriors to one another. They are withheld by suspicion or indifference from allowing others to look into what passes within them; and to speak with anything like emotion or agitation of that which is nearest our heart would be considered unsuitable to the tone of polished society. The orator and the dramatic poet find means to break down these barriers of conventional reserve. While they transport their hearers to such scenes of mental agitation, that their external signs break involuntarily forth, every man perceives in those around him the same degree of emotion, and those who before were strangers to one another, become in a moment intimately acquainted. The tears which the orator or the dramatic poet compels them to shed for persecuted innocence, or a dying hero, make friends and brothers of them all. The effect produced by seeing a number of others share in the same emotions, on an intense feeling which usually retires into solitude, or only opens itself to the confidence of friendship, is astonishingly powerful. The belief in the justness of the feeling becomes unshaken from its diffusion; we feel ourselves strong among so many associates, and the minds of all flow together in one great and overflowing stream. Hence the privilege of influencing an assembled crowd is exposed to a most dangerous abuse. As we may inspire them in the most disinterested manner, for the noblest and best of purposes, we may also ensnare them by the deceitful webs of sophistry, and dazzle them by the glare of false magnanimity, of which the crimes may be painted as virtues and even as sacrifices. Under the delightful dress of oratory and poetry, the poison steals imperceptibly into the ear and the heart. Above all things let the comic poet take heed, as from the nature of his subject he has a tendency to split on this rock, lest he afford an opportunity for the lower and baser parts of human nature to exhibit themselves without any disguise; for if, by the appearance of a common participation in these ignoble propensities, the shame is once overcome, which generally confines them within the bounds of decency, the depraved inclinations soon break out with the most unbridled licentiousness.

The powerful nature of such an engine for either good or bad purposes has justly, in all times, drawn the attention of the legislature to the drama. Many regulations have been devised in different states, to render it subservient to their views, and

guard against abuses. The great difficulty is to combine such a degree of freedom as is necessary for the production of works of excellence, with the precautions demanded by the customs and institutions of every state. In Athens the theatre flourished under the protection of religion, with the most unlimited freedom, and the public morality preserved it for a time from degeneracy. The comedies of Aristophanes, which with our views and habits appear so intolerably licentious, and in which the senate and the people themselves are covered with ridicule, were the seal of the Athenian freedom. Plato, again, who lived in the very same Athens, and witnessed or anticipated the decline of art, proposed the entire banishment of dramatic poets from his ideal republic. Few states however have conceived it necessary to subscribe to this severe sentence of condemnation; but few also have thought proper to leave the theatre to itself, without any superintendence. In many Christian countries the dramatic art has been honoured by being made subservient to religion, in the composition of spiritual subjects; and in Spain, more especially, competition has given birth to many works which neither devotion nor poetry will disown. In other states and under other circumstances, this has been thought offensive and unadvisable. Where a previous censure, and not merely an after responsibility on the part of the poet and player, is considered indispensable before a piece can appear on the stage, it will be found perhaps the most difficult of application to the very point of all others of the greatest importance: namely, the spirit and general impression of a piece. From the nature of the dramatic art, the poet must put much into the mouths of his characters of which he does not himself approve, and he conceives that his own sentiments should be appreciated from the spirit and connexion of the whole. It may again happen that a piece is perfectly inoffensive with respect to single speeches, and that they defy all censure, while upon the whole it may be calculated to produce the most dangerous effects. We have in our times seen but too many plays favourably received throughout Europe, overflowing with ebullitions of good-heartedness and traits of magnanimity, and in which, notwithstanding, a mind of any penetration could not mistake the concealed aim of the writer to sap the foundations of moral principles, and the respect for whatever ought to be held in veneration by men; and by that means to make the dissolute effeminacy of his contemporaries the panders to his success.* On the other hand, if any person were to undertake the defence of the moral tendency of Aristophanes, who has such a bad name,

* The author it is supposed alludes to Kotzebue — *Trans.*

and whose licentiousness in particular passages appears quite irreconcilable with our ideas, he would found it on the general object of his pieces, in which he at least displays the sentiments of a patriotic citizen.

The purport of these observations is to show the importance of the object of our consideration in a convincing manner. The theatre, where the magic of many combined arts can be displayed; where the most elevated and profound poetry has the most finished action for its interpreter, action which is at once eloquence and a living picture; while architecture lends her splendid receptacle, and painting her perspective deceptions, and even music contributes its assistance to attemper the minds, or to heighten by its melody the agitation into which they are already thrown; the theatre, in short, where the whole of the social cultivation and art of a nation, the fruits of centuries of continued exertions, may be represented in a few hours—has an extraordinary charm for every age, sex, and rank, and was ever the most delightful amusement of cultivated nations. Here, the prince, the statesman, and the leader of an army, see the great events of past times, resembling those in which they themselves may be called to act, laid open in their inmost springs and relations; the philosopher finds a subject for the deepest reflections on the nature and constitution of man; the artist follows with a curious eye the groups which pass rapidly before him, which in his infancy he embodies into future pictures; the susceptible youth opens his heart to every elevated feeling; age becomes young in recollection; even childhood sits with anxious expectation before the gaudy curtain, which is to be drawn up with a rustling noise, and to display so many unknown wonders: all are recreated, all are exhilarated, and all feel themselves for a time elevated above the sorrows and the daily cares and troubles of life. As the dramatic art, with the arts which are subservient to it, from neglect and contempt of artists and the public for one another, may degenerate to such a degree as to convert the theatre into the most trivial and stupid amusement, and even a downright waste of time, we conceive that we shall attempt something more than a light entertainment, if we enter on a consideration of the works produced by the most distinguished nations in their most flourishing times, and institute an inquiry into the means of ennobling and perfecting an art of such high importance.

So much for the importance of our object. We shall now enter into a preliminary consideration of the two opposite kinds into which all dramatic poetry may be divided, the *tragic* and *comic* and examine the meaning and import of each.

The three principal kinds of poetry are the epic, the lyric, and

the dramatic. All the other are either subordinate, or derived from these, or formed from combinations of them. When we wish to represent to ourselves these three kinds in all their purity, we must go back to the times in which they appeared among the Greeks. The theory is susceptible of the most convenient application from the history of Grecian poetry; for this poetry is well entitled to the appellation of systematical; and it contains, for every independent idea derived from experience, the most decisive and unexceptionable examples.

It is singular that in the epic and lyric poetry there is no such division into two opposite kinds, as in the dramatic. The comic epopee has, it is true, been styled a peculiar species, but it is a mere parody of the epos, and consists in applying its solemn development, which seems only suitable to great objects, to trifling and insignificant events. In lyric poetry there are only intervals and gradations between the song, the ode, and the elegy, but no proper contrast.

The spirit of the epic poem, as it appears in Homer, the father of epic poetry, is clear self-possession. The epos is a tragical representation of an action in progress. The poet relates joyful as well as mournful events, but he relates them with equanimity, and considers them as already past, and at a certain distance from us.

The lyric poem is the musical expression of mental emotions by language. The essence of musical feeling consists in this, that we endeavour from a sense of pleasure to dwell on, and even to perpetuate in our minds, some kind of emotion of a joyful or painful nature. The feeling must consequently be so much mitigated as not to impel us, from desire of pleasure or dread of pain, to tear ourselves from it, but such as to allow us, unconcerned at the flight of time, to feel ourselves at home for a single moment of our existence.

The dramatic poet represents external events as well as the epic, but he represents them as real and present. He also claims our participation, though not so exclusively as the lyric poet; but he excites a much more immediate feeling of joy and sorrow. He calls forth all the emotions which we experience on seeing the deeds and destinies of real men, and resolves these emotions into the gratification of a harmonious feeling, by the general effect of his impressions. As he approaches so closely to life, and even endeavours to give life to the whole of his poetry, the equanimity of the epic poet would in him be indifference; he must consider himself as forming an essential point in the relations of human life, and compel his audience to participate in the same feeling.

That I may return to a more simple and intelligible language,

the *tragic* and *comic* bear the same relation to one another as *earnestness* and *mirth*. Every man is acquainted with both these modifications of mind from his own experience. But their essence and their source is a subject that demands a deep philosophical investigation. Both, indeed, bear the stamp of our common nature; but earnestness belongs more to the moral, and mirth to the sensual side. The creatures destitute of reason are incapable of either seriousness or mirth. Animals seem indeed at times to labour as if they were earnestly intent upon an aim, and as if they made the present moment subordinate to the future; at other times they sport, that is, they give themselves up without object to the pleasure of existence: but they do not possess consciousness, which alone can elevate both these conditions to true earnestness and mirth. To man alone, of all the animals with which we are acquainted, is it permitted to look back towards the past, and forward into futurity; and he has purchased this noble privilege at a dear rate. Earnestness, in the most extensive signification, is the direction of our mental powers to some aim. But as soon as we begin to call ourselves to account for our actions, reason compels us to fix this aim higher and higher, till we come at last to the highest end of our existence: and here the desire for what is infinite, which dwells in our being, is thwarted by the limits of the finite by which we are fettered. All that we do, all that we effect, is vain and perishable; death stands everywhere in the back-ground, and every good or ill spent moment brings us in closer contact with him; and even when a man has been so singularly successful as to reach the utmost term of life without misfortune, he must still submit to leave all that is dear to him on earth, or to be left himself in a state of destitution. There is no bond of love without separation, no enjoyment without grief for its loss. When we contemplate, however, the relations of our existence to the extreme limit of possibilities: when we reflect on its entire dependence on an endless chain of causes and effects: when we consider that we are exposed in our weak and helpless state to struggle with the immeasurable powers of nature, and with conflicting desires on the shores of an unknown world, and in danger of shipwreck at our very birth; that we are subject to all manner of errors and deceptions, every one of which is capable of undoing us; that in our passions we carry our own enemy in our bosoms; that every moment demands from us the sacrifice of our dearest inclinations in the name of the most sacred duties; and that we may at one blow be robbed of all that we have acquired by toils and difficulties; that with every extensive possession the danger of loss is proportionally increased, we are only the more exposed to the snares of hostile attacks.

then every mind which is not dead to feeling must be overpowered by an inexpressible melancholy, against which there is no other protection than the consciousness of a destiny soaring above this earthly life. This is the tragic tone; and when the mind dwells on the consideration of the possible, as an existing reality, when that tone is inspired by the most striking examples of violent revolutions in human destiny, either from dejection of soul, or after powerful but ineffectual struggles; then *tragic poetry* has its origin. We thus see that tragic poetry has its foundation in our nature, and to a certain extent we have answered the question: why we are fond of mournful representations, and even find something consoling and elevating in them? The accordance which we have described is inseparable from strong feeling; and when there is an internal dissonance which poetry cannot remove, it should at least endeavour to attempt an ideal solution.

As earnestness, in the highest degree, is the essence of the tragic tone, the essence of the comic is mirth. The disposition to mirth is a forgetfulness of all gloomy considerations in the pleasant feeling of the present happiness. We are then inclined to view everything in a sportive light, and to admit no impressions calculated to disturb or ruffle us. The imperfections of men, and the irregularities in their conduct to one another, become no longer an object of our dislike and compassion, but serve, by their contrasts, to entertain the mind and delight the fancy. The comic poet must therefore carefully abstain from whatever is calculated to excite moral disgust with the conduct of men, or sympathy with their situation, because this would inevitably bring us back to earnestness. He must paint their irregularities as arising out of the predominance of the sensual part of their nature, and as constituting a mere ludicrous infirmity, which can be attended with no ruinous consequences. This is uniformly what takes place in what we call comedy, in which however there is still a mixture of seriousness, as I shall show in the sequel. The oldest comedy of the Greeks was, however, entirely gay, and in that respect formed the most complete contrast with their tragedy. Not only the characters and situations of individuals were worked up into a picture of the true comic, but the state, the constitution, the gods, and nature, were all fantastically painted in the most extravagantly ridiculous and laughable colours.

When we have formed in this manner a pure idea of the tragic and comic, as exhibited to us in Grecian examples, we shall then be enabled to analyze the various mixtures of both, displayed by the moderns, and to discriminate and separate the legitimate ingredients from those of a different description.

In the history of poetry and the fine arts among the Greeks,

their developement was subjected to an invariable law of separating in the most rigid manner everything dissimilar, and afterwards combining and elevating the similar, by internal excellence, to one independent and harmonious whole. Hence the various departments, with them, are all confined within their natural boundaries, and the different styles distinctly marked. In beginning, therefore, with the history of the Grecian art and poetry, we are not merely observing the order of time, but also the order of ideas.

In the majority of my hearers, I can hardly suppose an immediate knowledge of the Greeks, derived from the study of the original language. Translations in prose, or even in verse, which are nothing more than dresses in the modern taste, can afford no true idea of the Grecian drama. True and faithful translations, which endeavour in expression and versification to rise to the height of the original, have as yet been attempted only in German. But although our language is extremely flexible, and in many respects resembling the Greek, it is still a battle with unequal weapons; and stiffness and hardness not unfrequently supply the place of the easy sweetness of the Greek. But we are even far from having yet done all that can perhaps be accomplished: I know of no translation of a Greek tragedian deserving of unqualified praise. But even supposing the translation as perfect as possible, and to deviate very little from the original, the reader who is not acquainted with the other works of the Greeks, will be perpetually disturbed by the foreign nature of the subject, by national peculiarities, and numerous allusions which cannot be understood without learning, and prevented by particular parts, from forming a clear idea of the whole. So long as we have to struggle with difficulties, it is impossible for us to have any true enjoyment of art. To feel the ancients as we ought, we must have become in some degree one of themselves, and breathed as it were the Grecian air.

What is the best means of becoming imbued with the spirit of the Greeks, without a knowledge of their language? I answer without hesitation,—the study of the antique; and when this is impossible in the original, it is, by means of casts, to a certain extent within the power of every man. These models of the human form require no interpretation; their elevated character is imperishable, and will always be recognized throughout every succession of ages, and in every clime, where a noble race of men related to the Greek (which the European undoubtedly is) shall exist, and wherever the unkindness of nature has not sunk the human features too much below the pure standard, and, by habituating them to their own deformity, rendered them insensibl

to genuine corporeal beauty. Respecting the inimitable perfection of the antique in its few remains of a first rate character, there is but one voice throughout the whole of civilized Europe; and if ever their merit was called in question, it was in times when the plastic art of the moderns had sunk to the lowest degree of mannerism. Not only all intelligent artists, but all men of any degree of feeling, bow with the most enthusiastic adoration to the masterly productions of ancient sculpture.

The best key to enter this sanctuary of beauty, by deep and self-collected contemplation, is the history of art of our immortal Winkelmann. In particular parts, there are no doubt many deficiencies; it is even full of important errors, but no man has so deeply penetrated into the innermost spirit of Grecian art. Winkelmann transformed himself completely into an ancient, and lived only in appearance in his own century, unmoved by its influence.

The immediate subject of his work is the plastic arts, but it contains also many important views respecting other branches of Grecian cultivation, and is very useful as a preparation for the understanding their poetry, and especially their dramatic poetry. As this was destined for visible representation before spectators whose eye must have been as difficult to please on the stage as elsewhere, we have no better means of feeling the whole dignity of their idea of the tragic, and of giving it a sort of theatrical animation, than to have always present to our fancy the forms of their gods and heroes. This may appear somewhat singular at present, but I hope to be able in the sequel to demonstrate, in a more convincing manner, that we can only become properly acquainted with the tragedies of Sophocles, before the groups of Niobe or Laocoon.

We are yet without a work in which the formation and cultivation of the Greeks in poetry, art, science, and social life, should be painted as one grand and harmonious whole, as a true work of nature displaying the most astonishing symmetry and proportion in its parts, and in which the connexion of their common development should be traced in the same spirit which Winkelmann has exhibited in the part which he has executed. An attempt has indeed been made in a popular work which is in every body's hands, I mean the travels of the Younger Anacharsis. This book is valuable for its learning, and may be very useful in diffusing a knowledge of antiquities; but without censuring the errors of the dress in which it is exhibited, it betrays more good will to do justice to the Greeks, than ability to enter deeply into their spirit. In this respect the work is in many points superficial,

and even disfigured with modern views. It is not the travels of a young Scythian, but of an old Parisian.

The superiority of the Greeks, as I have already said, is the most universally acknowledged in the fine arts. An enthusiasm for their literature is in a great measure confined to the English and Germans, among whom also the study of the Grecian language is the most zealously prosecuted. It is singular that the French critics of all others, they who principally acknowledge the remains of the theoretical writing of the ancients on literature, Aristotle, Horace, Quintilian, &c. as infallible standards of taste, should yet distinguish themselves by the contemptuous and irreverent manner, in which they speak of their poetical compositions, and especially of their dramatic literature. Look for instance, into a book very much read,—La Harpe's *Cours de Littérature*. It contains many nice observations respecting the French Theatre; but he who should think of knowing the Greeks from it would be very ill advised: the author was as much deficient in a solid knowledge of their literature as in a sense for relishing it. Voltaire is often, also, most insupportable in the depreciation of the Greeks: he elevates or lowers them at the suggestions of his caprice, or as the necessity of the moment to produce such or such an effect on the mind of the public renders it expedient. I remember too to have read a rapid view of the Greek tragedies, somewhere in Metastasio, in which he treats their poets like so many school-boys. Racine is much more modest, and cannot be in any manner charged with this sort of presumption: he was of all of them, the best acquainted with the Greeks. It is easy to see into the motives of these hostile critics. The national vanity, and the vanity of the author, will afford us an easy solution: they conceive they have far surpassed the ancients, and they venture to commit such observations to the public, knowing that the works of the ancient poets, accessible only to the learned, have come down to us a mere dead letter, without the animating accompaniment of recitation, music, ideal and truly plastic imitation, and scenic pomp; all which in Athens was in such wonderful harmony with the poetry, that if once it could be represented to our eye and ear, it would silence the whole herd of these noisy and interested critics. The ancient statues require no commentary; they speak for themselves, and everything like supposed competition on the part of a modern artist would appear only in the light of ludicrous pretension. In the theatre, we lay great stress on the infancy of the art; and because their poets lived two thousand years before us, we conclude that we must have carried it farther than they did. In

~~This~~ way poor Æschylus is generally got rid of. But if we are to call it the infancy of the dramatic art, it was the infancy of a Hercules, who strangled serpents in his cradle.

I have already expressed myself on the subject of that partiality for the ancients, which would limit their excellence to a frigid exemption from error, and which exhibits them as models in such a way as to put a stop to everything like improvement, and reduces us to abandon the exercise of art as altogether fruitless. I am much rather disposed to believe that poetry, as the fervid expression of our whole being, must assume a new and peculiar form in different ages. I entertain, however, an enthusiastic adoration for the Greeks, as a people endowed by the peculiar favour of nature with the most perfect feeling for art, in the consciousness of which they gave to all nations with which they were acquainted, compared with themselves, the appellation of barbarians,—an appellation, in the use of which they were in some degree justified. I would not wish to imitate certain travellers, who, in returning from a country which their readers cannot easily visit, tell so many wondrous things as to injure their credibility. I shall rather endeavour to characterize them as they appear to me after sedulous and repeated study, without concealing their defects, and to bring a living picture of the Grecian scene before the eyes of my hearers.

We shall first treat of the Tragedy of the Greeks, then of their *old Comedy*, and lastly of the new Comedy which arose out of it.

The same theatrical accompaniments were common to all the three kinds. We must, therefore, give a short preliminary view of their architecture and ornaments, that we may have a distinct idea of their representation.

The histrionic art of the ancients had also many peculiarities, the use of masks for example, although these were quite different in tragedy and comedy; in the former *ideal*, and in the latter, at least in the old comedy, somewhat caricatured.

In Tragedy, we shall first consider what constituted its most distinctive peculiarity among the ancients: the ideality of the representation, the prevailing idea of destiny, and the chorus; and we shall lastly treat of their mythology as the materials of tragic poetry. We shall then proceed to characterize, in the tragedians still remaining, the different styles, that is, the necessary epochs in the history of the tragic art.

LECTURE III.

Structure of the stage among the Greeks.—Their acting.—Use of masks.—False comparison of ancient tragedy to the Opera.—Tragical Lyric Poetry.—Essence of the Greek Tragedies.—Ideality of the representation.—Idea of fate.—Source of the pleasure derived from tragical representations.—Import of the chorus.—The materials of the Greek tragedy derived from mythology.—Comparison with the plastic art.

WHEN we hear the word *theatre*, we naturally think of what with us bears the same name; and yet nothing can be more different from our theatre than the Grecian in every part of its construction. If in reading the Grecian pieces we associate our own stage with them, the light in which we shall view them must be false in every respect.

The accurate mathematical dimensions of the principal part of it are to be found in Vitruvius, who also distinctly points out the great difference between the Greek and Roman theatres. But these and similar passages of the ancient writers have been most perversely interpreted by architects unacquainted with the ancient dramatists;* and the philologists on the other hand, who were altogether ignorant of architecture, have also fallen into egregious errors. The ancient dramatists are still, therefore, altogether in want of that sort of illustration which relates to scenic regulation. In many tragedies I conceive that my ideas on this subject are sufficiently clear; but others again present difficulties which are not so easily solved. We find ourselves most at a loss in figuring to ourselves the representation of the pieces of Aristophanes: the ingenious poet must have brought his wonderful inventions before the eyes of his audience, in a manner equally bold and astonishing. Even Barthelemy's description of the Grecian stage is not a little confused; and the subjoined plan extremely erroneous; in the place which he assigns for the representation of the pieces, in *Antigone* and *Ajax* for instance, he is altogether wrong. The following observations will not therefore appear the less superfluous.†

* We have a remarkable instance of this, in the pretended ancient theatre of Palladio, at Vicenza. *Herculaneum*, it is true, had not then been discovered, and the ruins of the ancient theatre are not easily understood, if we have never seen one in an entire state.

† I am partly indebted for them to the illustrations of a learned architect, M. Genelli, of Berlin, author of the ingenious *Letters on Vitruvius*. We have compared several Greek tragedies with our interpretation of this description of Vitruvius, and endeavoured to figure to ourselves the manner in which they were represented; and I afterwards found my ideas confirmed, on an examination of the theatre of *Herculaneum*, and the two very small theatres at *Pompeii*.

The theatres of the Greeks were quite open above, and their dramas were always acted in open day, and beneath the canopy of heaven. The Romans, at an after period, endeavoured by a covering to shelter the audience from the rays of the sun; but this degree of luxury was hardly ever enjoyed by the Greeks. Such a state of things appears very inconvenient to us; but the Greeks had nothing of effeminacy about them, and we must not forget, too, the beauty of their climate. When they were overtaken by a storm or a shower, the play was of course interrupted; and they would much rather expose themselves to an accidental inconvenience, than, by shutting themselves up in a close and crowded house, entirely destroy the serenity of a religious solemnity, which their plays certainly were.* To have covered in the scene itself, and imprisoned gods and heroes in dark and gloomy apartments with difficulty lighted up, would have appeared still more ridiculous to them. An action which so nobly served to establish the belief of the relation with heaven could only be exhibited under an unobstructed heaven, and under the very eyes of the gods as it were, for whom, according to Seneca, the sight of a brave man struggling with adversity is a becoming spectacle. With respect to the supposed inconvenience, which, according to the assertion of many modern critics, was felt by the poets from the necessity of always laying the scene of their pieces before houses, a circumstance that often forced them to violate probability, this inconvenience was very little felt by tragedy and the older comedy. The Greeks, like so many southern nations of the present day, lived much more in the open air, than we do, and transacted many things in public places which usually take place with us in houses. For the theatre did not represent the street, but a place before the house belonging to it, where the altar stood on which sacrifices to the household gods were offered up. Here the women, who lived in so retired a manner among the Greeks, even those who were unmarried, might appear without any impropriety. Neither was it impossible for them to give a view of the interior of the houses; and this was effected, as we shall immediately see by means of the encyclema.

But the principal reason for this observance was that publicity, according to the republican notions of the Greeks, was essential to a grave and important transaction. This is clearly proved by the presence of the chorus, whose remaining on many occasions when secret transactions were going on has been judged

* They carefully made choice of a beautiful situation. The theatre at Tauromenium, at present Taormina, in Sicily, of which the ruins are still visible, was, according to Munter's description, situated in such a manner that the audience had a view of *Ætna* over the back ground of the theatre.

of according to rules of propriety inapplicable to that country, and most undeservedly censured.

The theatres of the ancients were, in comparison with the small scale of ours, of a colossal magnitude, partly for the sake of containing the whole of the people, with the concourse of strangers who flocked to the festivals, and partly to correspond with the majesty of the dramas represented in them, which required to be seen at a respectful distance. The seats of the spectators consisted of steps which rose backwards round the semicircle of the orchestra, (called by us the pit,) so that they could all see with equal convenience. The effect of distance was remedied by an artificial heightening of the subject, represented to the eye and ear, produced by means of masks, and contrivances for increasing the loudness of the voice, and the size of the figures. Vitruvius speaks also of vehicles of sound, distributed throughout the building; but the commentators are very much at variance with respect to them. We may without hesitation venture to assume, that the theatres of the ancients were constructed on excellent acoustical principles.

The lowest step of the amphitheatre was still raised considerably above the orchestra, and the stage was placed opposite to it, at an equal degree of elevation. The sunk semicircle of the orchestra contained no spectators, and was destined for another purpose. It was otherwise however with the Romans, but we are not at present considering the distribution of their theatres.

The stage consisted of a strip which stretched from one end of the building to the other, and of which the depth bore little proportion to this breadth. This was called the *logeum*, in Latin *pulpitum*, and the usual place for the persons who spoke was in the middle of it. Behind this middle part, the scene went inwards in a quadrangular form, with less depth, however, than breadth. The space here comprehended was called the *proscenium*. The remaining part of the logeum, to the right and left of the scene, had, both before the brink which adjoined the orchestra, and behind, a wall possessing no scenical decorations, but entirely simple, or at most architecturally ornamented, which was elevated to an equal height with the uppermost steps for the audience.

The decoration was contrived in such a manner, that the principal object in front covered the back-ground, and the prospects of distance were given at the two sides, the very reverse of the mode adopted by us. This had also its rules: on the left, appeared the town to which the palace, temple, or whatever occupied the middle, belonged; on the right, the open country, land-

scape, mountains, sea-shore, &c. The lateral decorations were composed of triangles which turned on an axis fastened underneath; and in this manner the change of scene was effected.* In the hindmost decoration it is probable that many things were exhibited in a bodily form which are only painted with us. When a palace or temple was represented, there appeared in the proscenium an altar, which answered a number of purposes in the performance of the pieces.

The decoration was for the most part architectural, but it was also not unfrequently a painted landscape, as in Prometheus, when it represented Caucasus; or in Philoctetus, where the desert island of Lemnos, with its rocks, and his cave were exhibited. It is clear, from a passage of Plato, that the Greeks, in the deceptions of theatrical perspective, carried things much farther than we are disposed to allow from some wretched landscapes discovered in Herculaneum.

In the back wall of this scene there was a large main entrance, and two side entrances. It has been maintained, that from them it might be discovered whether an actor played a principal or under part, as in the first case he came in at the main entrance, and in the second, at the side doors. But this should be understood with the distinction, that it must have been regulated according to the nature of the piece. As the hindmost decoration was generally a palace, in which the principal characters of royal descent resided, they naturally came through the great door, while the servants resided in the wings. There were two other entrances; the one at the end of the logeum, from whence the inhabitants of the town came; the other underneath in the orchestra, which was the side for those who had to come from a distance: they ascended a staircase of the logeum opposite to the orchestra, which could be applied to all sorts of purposes according to circumstances. The entrance, therefore, with respect to the lateral decorations, declared the place from whence the players were supposed to come: and it might naturally happen, that the principal characters were in a situation to avail themselves with propriety of the two last mentioned entrances. The situation of these entrances serves to explain many passages in the ancient dramas, where the persons standing in the middle see some one advancing, long before he approaches them. Beneath

* According to an observation on Virgil, by Servius, the change of scene was partly produced by revolving, and partly by withdrawing. The former applies to the lateral decorations, and the latter to the middle or back-ground. The partition in the middle opened, disappeared at both sides, and exhibited to view a new picture. But all the parts of the scene were not always changed at the same time.

the seats of the spectators, a stair was somewhere constructed, which was called the Charonic, and through which the shadows of the departed, without being perceived by the audience, ascended into the orchestra, and then, by the stair which we formerly mentioned, made their appearance on the stage. The nearest brink of the logeum sometimes represented the sea-shore. The Greeks were well skilled in availing themselves even of what lay beyond the decoration, and making it subservient to scenical effect. I doubt not, therefore, that in the Eumenides the spectators were twice addressed as an assembled people; first, by Pythia, when she calls upon the Greeks to consult the oracle; and a second time, when Pallas, by a herald, commands silence throughout the place of judgment. The frequent addresses to heaven were undoubtedly addressed to a real heaven; and when Electra on her first appearance exclaims: "O holy light, and thou air which fillest the expanse between earth and heaven!" she probably turned towards the rising sun. The whole of this procedure is highly deserving of praise; and though modern critics have censured the mixture of reality and imitation, as destructive of theatrical illusion, this only proves that they have misunderstood the essence of the illusion which can be produced by an artificial representation. If we are to be truly deceived by a picture, that is, if we are to believe in the reality of the object which we see, we must not perceive its limits, but look at it through an opening; the frame at once declares it for a picture. In scenical decorations we are now unavoidably compelled to make use of architectural contrivances, productive of the same effect as the frames of pictures. It is consequently much better to avoid this, and to renounce the modern illusion, though it may have its advantages, for the sake of extending the view beyond the mere decoration. It was, generally speaking, a principle of the Greeks, that everything imitated on the stage should, if possible, consist of actual representation; and only where this could not be done were they satisfied with a symbolical exhibition.

The machinery for the descent of gods through the air, or the withdrawing of men from the earth, was placed aloft behind the walls of the two sides of the scene, and consequently removed from the sight of the spectators. Even in the time of Æschylus, great use was made of it, as he not only brings Oceanus through the air on a griffin, but also introduces the whole choir of ocean nymphs, at least fifteen in number, in a winged chariot. There were hollow places beneath the stage, and contrivances for thunder and lightning, for the apparent fall or burning of a house, &c.

An upper story could be added to the farthest wall of the scene, when they wished to represent a tower with a wide prospect, or anything similar. The encyclema could be thrust behind the great middle entrance, a machine of a semicircular form within, and covered above, which represented the objects contained in it as in a house. This was used for producing a great theatrical effect, as we may see from many pieces. The side door of the entrance would naturally be then open, or the curtain which covered it withdrawn.

A stage curtain, which, we clearly see from a description of Ovid, was not dropped, but drawn upwards, is mentioned both by Greek and Roman writers, and the Latin appellation, *aulæum*, is even borrowed from the Greeks. I suspect, however, that the curtain on the Attic stage was not in use at its commencement. In the pieces of Æschylus and Sophocles the scene is evidently empty at the opening as well as the conclusion, and therefore it did not require any contrivance for preventing the view of the spectators. However, in many of the pieces of Euripides, perhaps also in the *Œdipus Tyrannus*, the stage is at once filled, and represents a standing group who could not have been first assembled under the eyes of the spectators. It must be recollected, that it was only the comparatively small *proscenium*, and not the *logeum*, which was covered by the curtain; for, from its great breadth, to have attempted to screen the *logeum* would have been almost impracticable, without answering any good end.

The entrances of the chorus were beneath in the orchestra, in which it generally remained, and in which also it performed its solemn dance, going backwards and forwards during the choral songs. In the front of the orchestra, opposite to the middle of the scene, there was an elevation with steps, resembling an altar, as high as the stage, which was called *thymele*. This was the station of the chorus when it did not sing, but merely took an interest in the action. The leader of the chorus then took his station on the top of the *thymele*, to see what was passing on the stage, and to communicate with the characters. For though the choral song was common to the whole, yet when it entered into the dialogue one person spoke for the rest; and hence we are to account for the shifting from *thou* to *ye* in addressing them. The *thymele* was situated in the very centre of the building; all the measurements were calculated from it, and the semicircle of the amphitheatre was described round that point. It was, therefore, an excellent contrivance to place the chorus, who were the ideal representatives of the spectators, in the very situation where all the radii were concentrated.

The tragical imitation of the ancients were altogether ideal,

and rhythmical; and in forming a judgment of it we must always keep this in view. It was ideal, as its chief object was the highest dignity and sweetness; and rhythmical, as the gestures and inflections of voice were measured in a more solemn manner than in real life. As the plastic art of the Greeks was formed, if we may so express ourselves, with scientific strictness on the most general conception, and embodied into various general characters which were gradually invested with the charms of animation, so that individuality was the last thing to which they turned their attention; in like manner in the mimetic art, their first idea was to exhibit their personages with heroical grandeur, a dignity more than human, and an ideal beauty: their second was character; and the last of all passion, which in the collision was thus forced to give way. The fidelity of the representation was less their object than its beauty: with us it is exactly the reverse. The use of masks, which appears astonishing to us, was not only justifiable on this principle, but absolutely essential; and far from considering them in the light of a last resource, the Greeks would with justice have considered as a last resource the being obliged to allow a player with vulgar, ignoble, or strongly marked individual features, to represent an Apollo or a Hercules. To them this would have appeared downright profanation. How limited is the power of the most finished actor, in changing the character of his features! And yet this has the most unfavourable influence on the expression of the passion, as all passion is tinged by the character. Neither are we obliged to have recourse to the conjecture, that they changed the masks in the different scenes, for the purpose of assuming a greater degree of joy or sorrow.* This would by no means have been sufficient, as the passions are often changed in the same scene; and then modern critics would still be obliged to suppose, that the masks exhibited a different appearance on one side, from what they did on the other, and that that side was turned towards the spectators which the circumstances of the moment required.† No; the countenance remain-

* I call it conjecture, though Barthelemy, in his *Anacharsis*, considers it a settled point. He cites no authorities, and I do not recollect any.

† Voltaire, in his *Essay on the Tragedy of the Ancients and Moderns*, prefixed to *Semiramis*, has actually gone so far. Amidst a multitude of supposed improprieties which he crowds together to confound the admirers of ancient tragedy, the following is one: *Aucune nation* (that is to say, excepting the Greeks) *ne fait paraître ses acteurs sur des espèces d'échasses, le visage couvert d'un masque, qui exprime la douleur d'un côté et la joie de l'autre*. In a conscientious inquiry into the evidence for an assertion so very improbable, and yet so boldly made, I can only find one passage in Quintilian, lib. xi. cap. 3. and an allusion of Platonius still more vague. (*Vide Aristoph. ed. Kaster, prolegom. p. x.*) Both passages refer only to the new comedy, and only amount to this, that in some characters the eyebrows were dissimilar. As to the view with which this took

ed from beginning to end the very same, as we may see from the antique masks cut out in stone. For the expression of the passion, the motion of the arms and hands, the attitudes, and the tone of the voice, remained to them. We complain of the want of the expression of the face, without reflecting, that at such a great distance its effect would have been lost.

We are not now inquiring whether, without the use of masks, it may not be possible to attain a higher degree of separate excellence in the mimetic art. This we would very willingly allow. Cicero, it is true, speaks of the expression, the softness, and delicacy of the acting of Roscius, in the same terms that a modern critic would apply to Garrick or Schröder. But I will not lay any stress on the acting of this celebrated player, the excellence of which has become proverbial, because it appears from a passage in Cicero that he frequently played without a mask, and that this was preferred by his contemporaries. I doubt, however, whether this ever took place among the Greeks. But the same writer relates, that actors in general, for the sake of acquiring the most perfect purity and flexibility of voice, (and not merely the musical voice, otherwise the example would not have been applicable to the orator,) submitted to such a course of uninterrupted exercises as our modern players, even the French who are the strictest in their discipline, would consider a most intolerable oppression. The ancients could show their dexterity in the mimetic art, considered by itself without the accompaniment of words, in their pantomimes, which they carried to a degree of perfection altogether unknown to the moderns. In tragedy, however, the great object in the art was strict subordination; the whole was to appear animated by one spirit, and hence, not merely the poetry, but the musical accompaniment, the scenical decoration and representation, were all the creation of the poet. The player was a mere tool, and his excellency consisted in the accuracy with which he filled up his part, and by no means in arbitrary bravura, or an ostentatious display of skill.

As from the quality of their writing materials they had not the convenience of many copies, the parts were studied from the repeated delivery of the poet, and the chorus exercised in the same manner. This was called teaching a piece. As the poet

place, I shall afterwards say a word or two in considering the new Greek comedy. Voltaire, however, is without excuse, as the mention of the cothurnus leaves no doubt that he alluded to tragic masks. But his error had probably no such learned origin. In most cases, it would be a fruitless task to trace the source of his ignorance. The whole description of the Greek tragedy, as well as that of the cothurnus in particular, is worthy of the man whose knowledge of antiquity was such, that in his *Essay on Tragedy*, prefixed to *Brutus*, he boasts of having introduced the Roman Senate on the stage in *red mantles*.

was also a musician, and for the most part a player likewise, this must have greatly contributed to the perfection of the representation.

We may safely allow that the task of the modern player, who must change his person without concealing it, is much more difficult; but this difficulty affords us no just criterion for deciding which of the two merits the preference as a representation of the noble and the beautiful.

As the features of the player acquired a more decided expression from the mask, as his voice was strengthened by a contrivance for that purpose, the cothurnus, which consisted of several considerable additions to his soles, as we may see in the ancient statues of Melpomene, raised in like manner his figure considerably above the middle standard. The female parts were also played by men, as the voice and other qualities of women would have conveyed an inadequate idea of the energy of tragic heroines.

The forms of the masks,* and the whole appearance of the tragic figures, we may easily suppose, were sufficiently beautiful and dignified. We should do well to have the ancient sculpture always present to our minds; and the most accurate conception, perhaps, that we can possibly have, is to imagine them so many statues in the grand style endowed with life and motion. But, as in sculpture, they were fond of dispensing as much as possible with dress, for the sake of exhibiting the more essential beauty

* We have obtained a knowledge of them from the imitations in stone which have come down to us. They display both beauty and variety. That great variety must have taken place in the tragical department (in the comic, we can have no doubt about the matter) is evident from the rich store of technical expressions in the Greek language for every gradation of the age, and character of masks. See the *Onomasticon* of Jul. Pollux. In the marble masks, however, we can neither see the thinness of the mass from which the real masks were executed, the more delicate colouring, nor the exquisite mechanism of the joinings. The abundance of excellent workmen possessed by Athens, in everything which had a reference to the plastic arts, will warrant the conjecture that they were in this respect inimitable. Those who have seen the masks of wax in the grand style, which in some degree contain the whole head, lately contrived at the Roman carnival, may form to themselves a pretty good idea of the theatrical masks of the ancients. They imitate life even to its movements in a most masterly manner, and at such a distance as that from which the ancient players were seen, the deception is most perfect. They always contain the apple of the eye, as we see it in the ancient masks, and the person covered sees merely through the aperture left for the iris. The ancients must have gone still farther, and contrived also an iris for the masks, according to the anecdote of the singer Thamyris, who, in a piece which was probably of Sophocles, made his appearance with a blue and a black eye. Even accidental circumstances were imitated; for instance, the cheeks of Tyro, down which the blood had rolled from the cruel conduct of his stepmother. The head from the mask must no doubt have appeared somewhat large for the rest of the figure; but this disproportion, in tragedy at least, would not be perceived from the elevation of the cothurnus.

of the figure; on the stage they would endeavour from an opposite principle to clothe as much as they could well do, both from a regard to decency, and because the actual forms of the body would not correspond sufficiently with the beauty of the countenance. They would also exhibit their divinities, which in sculpture we always observe either entirely naked, or only half covered, in a complete dress. They had recourse to a number of means for giving a suitable strength to the forms of the limbs, and thus restoring proportion to the increased height of the player.

The great breadth of the theatre in proportion to its depth must have given to the grouping of the figures the simple and distinct order of the bas-relief. We prefer on the stage, as well as everywhere else, groups of a picturesque description, more crowded, in part covered by themselves, and stretching out into distance; but the ancients were so little fond of foreshortening, that even in their painting they generally avoided it. The gestures accompanied the rhythmus of the declamation, and were intended to display the utmost beauty and sweetness. The poetical conception required a certain degree of repose in the action, and that the whole should be kept in masses, so as to exhibit a succession of plastic attitudes, and it is not improbable that the player remained for some time motionless in the same position. But we are not to suppose from this, that the Greeks were contented with a cold and spiritless representation of the passions. How could we reconcile such a supposition with the fact, that whole lines of their tragedies are frequently dedicated to inarticulate exclamations of pain, with which we have nothing to correspond in any of our modern languages?

It has been often conjectured that the delivery of their dialogue must have resembled the modern recitative. For this conjecture there is no other foundation than that the Greek, like almost all the southern languages, must have been pronounced with a greater musical inflexion of the voice than our languages of the north. In other respects I conceive that their tragic declamation must have been altogether unlike recitative, much more measured, and far removed from its learned and artificial modulation.

The ancient tragedy has also been frequently compared with the opera, because it was accompanied with music and dancing.* But this betrays the most complete ignorance of the spirit of classical antiquity. Their dancing and music had nothing in common with ours, but the name. In tragedy the chief object was

* Even Barthelemy falls into this error in a note to the 70th chapter of *Anacharsis*.

the poetry, and every other thing was strictly subordinate to it. But in the opera the poetry is merely an accessory, the means of connecting the different parts together; and it is almost buried under its associates. The best prescription for the composition of the text of an opera is to give a poetical sketch, which may be afterwards filled up and coloured by the other arts. This anarchy of the arts, where music, dancing, and decoration endeavour to surpass each other by the most profuse display of dazzling charms, constitutes the very essence of the opera. What sort of opera music would it be, where the words should receive a mere rhythmical accompaniment of the simplest modulations? The fantastic magic of the opera consists altogether in the luxurious competition of the different means, and in the perplexity of an overpowering superfluity. This would at once be destroyed by an approximation to the severity of the ancient taste in any one point, even in that of the costume; for the contrast would render the variety in all the other departments quite insupportable. The costume of the opera ought to be dazzling, and overladen with ornaments; and hence many things which have been censured as unnatural, such as exhibiting heroes warbling and trilling in the excess of despondency, are perfectly justifiable. This fairy world is not peopled by real men, but by a singular kind of singing creatures. Neither is it any disadvantage to us that the opera is conveyed in a language which is not generally understood; the text is altogether lost in the music, and the language the most harmonious and musical, and which contains the greatest number of open vowels, and distinct accents for recitative, is therefore the best. It would be as absurd to attempt to give to the opera the simplicity of the Grecian tragedy, as it is to declare that there is any resemblance between them.

In the syllabic composition which then at least prevailed in the Grecian music, the solemn choral song, of which we may form to ourselves some idea from our artless national airs, and more especially those sung in churches, had no other instrumental accompaniment than a single flute, which certainly could not in the slightest degree impair the distinctness of the words. The choruses and lyrical songs, in general, are the parts the most difficult to understand of the ancient tragedy, and they must have also been the most difficult to contemporary auditors. They abound with most involved constructions, the most unusual expressions, and the boldest images and allusions. Why then should the poets have lavished such labour and art on them, if all this labour and art were to be lost in the delivery? Such a display of ornament without aim was very unlike the way of thinking of the Greeks.

In the syllabic measure of their tragedies, there generally prevails a highly finished regularity, which by no means however appears a stiff symmetrical uniformity. Besides the infinite variety of the lyrical strophes, which were always invented by the poet for the occasion, they have also a measure to denote the mental transition from the dialogue to the lyric, the anapest; and two for the dialogue itself, of which the one by far the most general, the iambic trimeter, denoted the regular progress of the action, and the other, the trochaic tetrameter, was expressive of sudden passion. It would lead us too far into the depths of Greek metres, were we to venture at present on a more minute account of the quality and import of these measures. I merely wished to make this remark, as so much has been said of the simplicity of the ancient tragedy, which in the general plan, at least in the two oldest poets, it is impossible not to allow; but this simplicity is merely applicable to the plan, for the richest variety of poetical ornament is observable in the execution. It must be remembered that the utmost accuracy in the delivery of the different modes of versification was expected from the player, as the delicacy of the Grecian ear would not excuse, even in an orator, the false quantity of a single syllable.

We come now to the essence of the Greek tragedy itself. In stating that the conception was ideal, we are not to understand that the different characters were all morally perfect. In this case what room could there be for such an opposition or conflict, as the plot of a drama requires? Weaknesses, errors, and even crimes, were portrayed in them, but the manners were always elevated above reality, and every person was invested with such a portion of dignity and grandeur as was compatible with the share which he possessed in the action. The ideality of the representation chiefly consisted in the elevation to a higher sphere. The tragical poetry wished wholly to separate the image of humanity which it exhibited to us, from the ground of nature to which man is in reality chained down, like a feudal slave. How was this to be accomplished? By exhibiting to us an image hovering in the air? But this would have been incompatible with the law of gravitation and with the earthly materials of which our bodies are framed. Frequently, what we praise in art as ideal is really nothing more. But the production of airy floating shadows can make no durable impression on the mind. The Greeks, however, succeeded in combining in the most perfect manner in their art ideality with reality, or, dropping school terms, an elevation more than human with all the truth of life, and all the energy of bodily qualities. They did not allow their figures to flutter without consistency in empty space, but they fixed the

statue of humanity on the eternal and immovable basis of moral liberty; and that it might stand there unshaken, being formed of stone or brass, or some more solid mass than the living human bodies; it made an impression by its own weight, and from its very elevation and magnificence it was only the more decidedly subjected to the law of gravity.

Inward liberty and external necessity are the two poles of the tragic world. Each of these ideas can only appear in the most perfect manner by the contrast of the other. As the feeling of internal dignity elevates the man above the unlimited dominion of impulse and native instinct, and in a word absolves him from the guardianship of nature, so the necessity which he must also recognize ought to be no mere natural necessity, but to lie beyond the world of sense in the abyss of infinitude; and it must consequently be represented as the invincible power of fate. Hence it extends also to the world of the gods: for the Grecian gods are mere powers of nature; and although immeasurably higher than mortal man, yet, compared with infinitude, they are on an equal footing with himself. In Homer and the tragedians, the gods are introduced in a manner altogether different. In the former their appearance is arbitrary and accidental, and can communicate no higher interest to the epic poem than the charm of the wonderful. But in tragedy the gods either enter in obedience to fate, and to carry its decrees into execution; or they endeavour in a godlike manner to assert their liberty of action, and appear involved in the same struggles with destiny which man has to encounter.

This is the essence of the tragic in the sense of the ancients. We are accustomed to give to all terrible or sorrowful events the appellation of tragic, and it is certain that such events are selected in preference by tragedy, though a melancholy conclusion is by no means indispensably necessary, and several ancient tragedies, viz. the *Eumenides*, *Philoctetus*, and in some degree also the *Œdipus Colonus*, without mentioning many of the pieces of *Euripides*, have a happy and enlivening termination.

But why does tragedy select those objects which are so dreadfully repugnant to the wishes and the wants of our sensible nature? This question has often been asked, and seldom answered in a very satisfactory manner. Some have said that the pleasure of such representations arises from the comparison between the calmness and tranquillity of our own situation, and the storms and perplexities to which the victims of passion are exposed. But when we take a warm interest in a tragedy, we cease to think of ourselves; and when this is not the case, it is the best of all proofs that we take but a feeble interest, and that the tragedy has failed in its effect. Others again have had recourse to our feeling for

moral improvement, which is gratified by the view of poetical justice in the reward of the good and the punishment of the wicked. But he whom the aspect of such dreadful examples could in reality improve, would be conscious of a sentiment of depression and humiliation, very far removed from genuine morality and elevation of mind. Besides, poetical justice is by no means indispensable in a good tragedy; it may end with the suffering of the just and the triumph of the wicked, when the balance is once restored by the prospect of futurity. Small will be our improvement, if with Aristotle we say that the object of tragedy is to purify the passions by pity and terror. In the first place the commentators have never been able to agree as to the meaning of this proposition, and have had recourse to the most forced explanations. Look for instance into the *Dramaturgie* of Lessing. Lessing gives a new explanation, and conceives he has found in Aristotle a poetical Euclid. But mathematical demonstrations are subject to no misconception, and geometrical evidence is not applicable to the theory of the fine arts. Supposing however tragedy to operate this moral cure in us, it must do so by the painful feelings of terror and compassion: and it remains to be proved how we should take a pleasure in subjecting ourselves to such an operation.

Others have been pleased to say that we are attracted to theatrical representations from the want of some violent agitation to rouse us out of the torpor of everyday life. I have already acknowledged the existence of this want, when speaking of the attractions of the drama; and to it we are even to attribute the fights of wild beasts and gladiators among the Romans. But must we who are less indurated, and more inclined to tender feelings, be desirous of seeing demi-gods and heroes descend into the bloody lists of the tragic stage, like so many desperate gladiators, that our nerves may be shaken by the aspect of their sufferings? No: it is not the aspect of suffering which constitutes the charm of a tragedy, or the amusement of a circus or wild beast fight. In the latter we see a display of activity, strength, and courage, qualities related to the mental and moral powers of man. The satisfaction which we derive from the representation of the powerful situations and overwhelming passions in a good tragedy, must be ascribed either to the feeling of the dignity of human nature, excited by the great models exhibited to us, or to the trace of a higher order of things, impressed on the apparently irregular progress of events, and secretly revealed in them; or to both of these causes together.

The true cause, therefore, why in tragical representations we cannot exclude even that which appears harsh and cruel is, that a

spiritual and invisible power can only be measured by the opposition which it encounters from some external force that can be taken in by the senses. The moral freedom of man can therefore only be displayed in a conflict with the impulse of the senses: so long as it is not called into action by a higher power, it is either actually dormant in him, or appears to slumber, as it can fill no part as a mere natural entity. The moral part of our nature can only be preserved amidst struggles and difficulties, and if we were therefore to ascribe a distinctive aim to tragedy, as instructive, it should be this: that all these sufferings must be experienced, and all these difficulties overcome, to establish the claims of the mind to a divine origin, and teach us to estimate the earthly existence as vain and insignificant.

With respect to everything connected with this point, I refer my hearers to the Section on the *Sublime* in *Kant's Criticism of the Judgment* (*Kritik der Urtheilskraft*), to the complete perfection of which nothing is wanting but a more definite idea of the tragedy of the ancients, with which he does not seem to have been very well acquainted.

I come now to another peculiarity which distinguishes the tragedy of the ancients from ours, I mean the chorus. We must consider it as the personification of opinion on the action which is going on; the incorporation into the representation itself of the sentiments of the poet, as the interpreter for the whole human race. This is the general poetical character which we must here assign to it, and that character is by no means affected by the circumstance that the chorus had a local origin in the feasts of Bacchus, and that it always had a peculiar national signification with the Greeks. We have already said that, with their republican way of thinking, publicity was considered essential to every important transaction. As in their compositions they went back to the heroic ages, they gave a certain republican cast to the families of their heroes, by carrying on the action either in presence of the elders of the people, or those persons whose characters entitled them to respect. This publicity does not, it is true, correspond with Homer's picture of the manners of the heroic age; but both in the costume and the mythology, the dramatic poetry generally displayed a spirit of independence and conscious liberty.

The chorus was therefore introduced to give the whole that appearance of reality which was most consistent with the fable. Whatever it might be in particular pieces, it represented in general, first the national spirit, and then the general participation of mankind. In a word, the chorus is the ideal spectator. It mitigates the impression of a heart-rending or moving story, while it conveys to the actual spectator a lyrical and musical expression

of his own motions, and elevates him to the region of consideration.

The modern critics have never known what to make of the chorus; and this is the less to be wondered at, as Aristotle affords no satisfactory solution of the difficulty. The business of the chorus is better painted by Horace, who ascribes to it a general expression of moral participation, instruction and admonition. But the critics in question have either believed that its chief subject was to prevent the stage from ever being altogether empty, although the proper place for the chorus was not upon the stage; or they have censured it as a superfluous and laughable accompaniment, and seemed astonished at the supposed impropriety of carrying on secret transactions in the presence of assembled multitudes. This they consider as the principal reason for the observance of the unity of place, as it could not be changed by the poet, without the dismissal of the chorus, an act which would have required at least some sort of pretext; they believe that the chorus owed its continuance from the first origin of tragedy merely to accident; and as it is easy to perceive that in Euripides, the last tragic poet which we have, the choral songs have frequently little or no connection with the fable, and form a mere episodical ornament, they therefore conclude that the Greeks had only to take one other step in dramatic art, to explode the chorus altogether. To refute these superficial conjectures, it is only necessary to observe, that Sophocles wrote a Treatise on the chorus, in prose, in opposition to the principles of some other poets, and that far from following blindly the practice which he found established, like an intelligent artist, he could assign reasons for the system which he adopted.

Modern poets of the very first rank, since the revival of the study of the ancients, have often attempted to introduce the chorus in their pieces, for the most part without a correct, and always without a vivid idea of its destination: But we have no suitable singing or dancing, neither have we, as our theatres are constructed, any place for it; and it will hardly ever succeed, therefore, in becoming naturalized with us.

The Greek tragedy, in its pure and unaltered state, will always for our theatre remain an exotic plant, which we can hardly hope to cultivate with any success, even in the hot-house of learned art and criticism. The Grecian mythology, which constitutes the materials of ancient tragedy, is as foreign to the minds and imaginations of most of the spectators, as its form and mode of representation. But to endeavour to constrain another subject, a historical one for example, to assume that form, must always be a most unprofitable and hopeless attempt.

I have called **mythology** the chief materials of tragedy. We know, indeed, of two historical tragedies, by Grecian authors: the *Capture of Miletus*, of Phrynichus, and the *Persians*, of Æschylus, a piece which still exists; but these singular exceptions, both belonging to an epoch when the art had not attained its full maturity, among so many hundred examples of a different description, serve to establish more strongly the truth of the rule. The sentence passed by the Athenians on Phrynichus, whom they subjected to a pecuniary fine because, in the representation of contemporary calamities which with due caution they might have avoided, he had agitated them in too violent a manner, however hard and arbitrary it may appear in a judicial point of view, displays however a correct feeling with respect to the subject and the limits of art. The mind suffering under the near reality of the subject cannot possess the necessary repose and self-possession which are necessary for the reception of pure tragical impressions. The heroic fables, on the other hand, appear always at a certain distance, and in the light of the wonderful. The wonderful possesses the advantage of being believed, and in some degree disbelieved, at the same time: believed in so far as it is founded on the connexion with other opinions; disbelieved while we never take such an immediate interest in it as we do in what wears the hue of the everyday life of our own age. The Grecian mythology was a web of national and local traditions, held in equal honour as a part of religion and as an introduction to history; everywhere preserved in full life among the people by customs and monuments, and by the numberless works of epic and mythical poets. The tragedians had only therefore to engraft one species of poetry on another: they were always allowed their use of certain established fables, invaluable for their dignity, grandeur, and remoteness from all accessory ideas of petty description. Everything, down to the very errors and weaknesses of that departed race of heroes who claimed their descent from the gods, was consecrated in the eyes of the people. Those heroes were painted as beings endowed with more than human strength; but, so far from possessing unerring virtue and wisdom, they were also represented as under the dominion of furious and unbridled passions. It was a wild age of effervescence: the cultivation of social order had not as yet rendered the soil of morality arable, and it yielded at the same time the most beneficent and poisonous productions, with the fresh and luxuriant fulness of a creative nature. Here the monstrous and ferocious were not a necessary indication of the degradation and corruption with which they are necessarily associated under the developement of law and order, and which fill us with sentiments of horror and aversion. The criminals

of the fabulous ages are not, if we may be allowed the expression, amenable to the tribunals of men, but consigned over to a higher jurisdiction. Some are of opinion that the Greeks, in their republican zeal, took a particular pleasure in witnessing the representation of the outrages and consequent calamities of the different royal families, and are almost disposed to consider the ancient tragedy, in general, as a satire on monarchical government. This party view would, however, have deadened the interest of the audience, and consequently destroyed the effect which it was the aim of the tragedy to produce. But we must remark, that the royal families, whose crimes and misfortunes afforded the most abundant materials for tragical pictures of a horrible description, were the Pelopidæ of Mycenæ, and the Labdacidæ of Thebes, families which were foreign to the Athenians, for whom the pieces were composed. We do not see that the Attic poets endeavoured to exhibit the ancient kings of their country in an odious light; on the contrary, they always hold up their national hero, Theseus, for public admiration, as a model of justice and moderation, the champion of the oppressed, the first lawgiver, and even the founder of their liberty; and it was one of their favourite modes of flattering the people, to persuade them that, even in the heroic ages, Athens was distinguished above all the other states of Greece, for obedience to the laws, humanity, and a knowledge of the rights of nations. The general revolution, by which the independent kingdoms of ancient Greece were converted into a community of free states, had separated the heroic age from the age of social cultivation, by a wide interval, beyond which the genealogy of a very few families only was attempted to be traced. This was extremely advantageous for the ideal elevation of the characters of their tragedy, as few human things will admit of a close inspection into them, without betraying their imperfections. But in the very different relations of the age in which those heroes lived, the standard of mere civil and domestic morality was not applicable, and the feeling must go back to the primary ingredients of humanity. Before the existence of constitutions,—before the proper development of law and right, the sovereigns and rulers were their own lawgivers in a world not yet subjected to order; and the fullest scope was thus given to the dominion of will for good and for bad purposes. Hereditary rule, therefore, exhibited more striking instances of sudden changes of fortune than the later times of political equality. In these respects the high rank of the principal characters was essential, or at least favourable to tragic representation, and not because, according to the idea of some moderns, those only who can occasion the happiness

or misery of numbers are sufficiently important to interest us in their behalf, nor because internal elevation of sentiment must be clothed with external dignity, to claim our honour and admiration. The Greek tragedians paint the downfall of kingly houses without any reference to the condition of the people; they show us the man in the king, and, far from veiling their heroes from our sight in their purple mantles, they allow us to look through their vain splendour, into a bosom torn and harrowed up by passions. That the regal pomp was not so necessary as the heroic costume is evident, not only from the practice of the ancients, but from the tragedies of the moderns having a reference to the throne, produced under different circumstances, namely the existence of monarchical government. They dare not draw from existing reality, for nothing is less suitable for tragedy than a court, and a court life. Where they do not therefore paint an ideal kingdom with distant manners, they fall into stiffness and formality, which are much more destructive to freedom and boldness of character, and to deep pathos, than the narrow circle of private life.

A few mythological fables only seem originally marked out for tragedy: such, for example, as the long-continued alternation of aggressions, vengeance, and maledictions, which we witness in the house of Atreus. When we examine the names of the pieces which are lost, we have great difficulty in conceiving how the mythological fables on which they are founded, as they are known to us, could afford sufficient materials for the developement of an entire tragedy. It is true, the poets, in the various relations of the same story, had a great amplitude of selection; and this very variety justified them in going still farther, and making considerable alterations in the circumstances of an event, so that the inventions added to one piece sometimes contradict the accounts given by the same poet in another. We are, however, principally to ascribe the productiveness of mythology, for the tragic art, to the principle which we observe so powerful throughout the whole historical range of Grecian cultivation; namely, that the power which preponderated for the time assimilated everything to itself. As the heroic fables, in all their deviations, were easily developed into the tranquil fulness and light variety of epic poetry, they were afterwards adapted to the object which the tragedians proposed to accomplish, by earnestness, energy, and compression; and what in this change of destination appeared inapplicable to tragedy still afforded materials for a sort of half sportive, though ideal representation, in the subordinate walk of the *satirical drama*.

I shall be forgiven, I hope, if I attempt to illustrate the above

reflections on the essence of the ancient tragedy, by a comparison borrowed from the plastic arts, which will, I trust, be found somewhat more than a mere fanciful allusion.

The Homeric epic is, in poetry, what half-raised workmanship is in sculpture, and tragedy the distinctly separated group.

The poem of Homer sprung from the soil of the traditionary tale, is not yet purified from it, as the figures of a bas-relief are borne by a back-ground which is foreign to them. These figures appear depressed, and in the epic poem all is painted as past and remote. In the bas-relief they are generally thrown into profile, and in the epic characterized in the most artless manner: they are, in the former, not properly grouped, but follow one another; and the Homeric heroes, in like manner, advance singly in succession before us. It has been remarked that the *Iliad* is not definitively closed, but that we are left to suppose something both to precede and to follow. The bas-relief is equally boundless, and may be continued *ad infinitum*, either from before or behind, on which account the ancients preferred the selection of those objects for it, which admitted of an indefinite extension, as the trains at sacrifices, dances, and rows of combatants, &c. Hence they also exhibited bas-reliefs on round surfaces, such as vases, or the frieze of a rotunda, where the two ends are withdrawn from our sight by the curvature, and where, on our advancing, one object appears as another disappears. The reading of the Homeric poetry very much resembles such a circumgiration, as the present object alone arrests our attention, while that which precedes and follows is allowed to disappear.

But in the distinctly formed group, as in tragedy, sculpture and poetry bring before our eyes an independent and definite whole. To separate it from natural reality, the former places it on a base, as on an ideal ground. It also removes as much as possible all foreign and accidental accessories, that the eye may wholly rest on the essential objects, the figures themselves. These figures are wrought into the most complete rounding, yet they refuse the illusion of colours, and announce by the purity and uniformity of the mass of which they are constructed, a creation not endowed with perishable life, but of a higher and more elevated character.

Beauty is the object of sculpture, and repose is most advantageous for the display of beauty. Repose alone, therefore, is suitable to the figure. But a number of figures can only be connected together and grouped by one action. The group represents beauty in motion, and the object of it is to combine both in the highest degree. This can only be effected when the artist finds means, in the most violent bodily or mental anguish, to

moderate the expression by manly resistance, calm grandeur, or inherent sweetness, in such a manner that, with the most moving truth, the features of beauty shall yet in nowise be disfigured. The observation of Winkelmann on this subject is inimitable. He says that beauty with the ancients was the tongue on the balance of expression, and in this sense the groups of Niobe and Laocoön are master-pieces; the one in the sublime and serious, the other in the learned and ornamental style.

The comparison with ancient tragedy is the more apposite here, as we know that both Æschylus and Sophocles produced a Niobe, and that Sophocles was also the author of a Laocoön. In Laocoön the conflicting sufferings and anguish of the body, and the resistance of the soul, are balanced with the most wonderful equilibrium. The children calling for help, tender objects of our compassion, and not of our admiration, draw us back to the appearance of the father, who seems to turn his eyes in vain to the gods. The convolving serpents exhibit to us the inevitable destiny which unites together the characters in so dreadful a manner. And yet the beauty of proportion, the delightful flow of the attitude, are not lost in this violent struggle; and a representation the most frightful to the senses is yet treated with a degree of moderation, while a mild breath of sweetness is diffused over the whole.

In the group of Niobe there is also the most perfect mixture of terror and pity. The upturned looks of the mother, and the mouth half open in supplication, seem to accuse the invisible wrath of Heaven. The daughter, clinging in the agonies of death to the bosom of her mother, in her infantine innocence can have no other fear than for herself: the innate impulse of self-preservation was never represented in a manner more tender and affecting. Can there on the other hand be exhibited to the senses a more beautiful image of self-devoting heroic magnanimity than Niobe, as she bends her body forwards, that if possible she may alone receive the destructive bolt? Pride and repugnance are melted down in the most ardent maternal love. The more than earthly dignity of the features are the less disfigured by pain, as from the quick repetition of the shocks she appears, as in the fable, to have become insensible and motionless. But before this figure, twice transformed into stone, and yet so inimitably animated,—before this line of demarcation of all human suffering, the most callous beholder is dissolved in tears.

In all the agitation produced by the sight of these groups, there is still somewhat in them which invites us to composed contemplation; and in the same manner, the tragedy of the ancients leads us, even in the course of the representation, to the most elevated reflections on our existence, and those mysteries in our destiny which can never wholly be explained.

LECTURE IV.

Program of the tragic art among the Greeks—Their different styles—Æschylus—**Connexion** in a trilogy of Æschylus—His remaining works—Life and poetical **character** of Sophocles—Character of his different tragedies.

OF the inexhaustible stores possessed by the Greeks in the department of tragedy, which the public competition at the Athenian festivals called into being, as the rival poets always contended for a prize, very little indeed has come down to us. We only possess works of three of their numerous tragedians, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and these in no proportion to the number of their compositions. The three authors in question were selected by the Alexandrian critics as the foundation for the study of ancient Grecian literature, not because they alone were deserving of estimation, but because they afforded the best illustration of the various styles of tragedy. Of each of the two oldest poets, we have seven remaining pieces; in these however we have, according to the testimony of the ancients, several of their most distinguished productions. Of Euripides we have a much greater number, and we might well exchange many of them for other works which are now lost; for example, the satirical dramas of Achaüs, Æschylus, and Sophocles, several pieces of Phrynichus for the sake of comparison with Æschylus, or of Agathon, whom Plato describes as effeminate, but sweet and affecting, and who was a contemporary of Euripides though somewhat younger.

We leave to antiquarians the car of the strolling Thespis, the competition for a he-goat, from which the name of tragedy was derived, the visages of the first improvisatore actors smeared over with lees, that they may ascertain the rude beginnings from which Æschylus, by one gigantic stride, gave that dignified character to tragedy under which it appears in his works, and shall proceed immediately to the consideration of the poets themselves.

The tragic style (giving to the word style the sense which it receives in the plastic arts, and not the exclusive signification in writing) of Æschylus is grand, severe, and not unfrequently hard: in the style of Sophocles we observe the most complete proportion and harmonious sweetness: the style of Euripides is soft and luxuriant; extravagant in his easy fulness, he sacrifices the general effect to brilliant passages. From the analogy which the undisturbed development of the fine arts among the Greeks

everywhere offers to us, we may compare the epochs of tragic art to those of sculpture. *Æschylus* is the *Phidias* of the tragic art, *Sophocles* the *Polycletus*, and *Euripides* the *Lysippus*. *Phidias* formed sublime images of the gods, but he was still attached to the extrinsic magnificence of materials; and he surrounded their majestic repose with images of the most violent struggles. *Polycletus* carried the art to perfection, and hence one of his statues was called the rule of beauty. *Lysippus* distinguished himself by the fire of his works; but in his time sculpture had deviated from its original destination, and was much more desirous of expressing the charm of motion and life than of adhering to ideality of form.

Æschylus is to be considered as the creator of tragedy, which sprung from him completely armed, like *Pallas* from the head of *Jupiter*. He clothed it in a state of suitable dignity, and gave it an appropriate place of exhibition; he was the inventor of scenic pomp, and not only instructed the chorus in singing and dancing, but appeared himself in the character of a player. He was the first who gave developement to the dialogue, and limits to the lyrical part of the tragedy, which still however occupies too much space in his pieces. He draws his characters with a few bold and strongly marked features. The plans are simple in the extreme: he did not understand the art of enriching and varying an action, and dividing its developement and catastrophe into parts, bearing a due proportion to each other. Hence his action often stands still, and this circumstance becomes still more apparent, from the undue extension of his choral songs. But all his poetry betrays a sublime and serious mind. Terror is his element, and not the softer affections; he holds up the head of *Medusa* to his astonished spectators. His manner of treating fate is austere in the extreme: he suspends it over the heads of mortals in all its gloomy majesty. The cothurnus of *Æschylus* has as it were an iron weight: gigantic figures alone stalk before our eyes. It seems as if it required an effort in him, to condescend to paint mere men to us: he abounds most in the representation of gods, and seems to dwell with particular delight in exhibiting the *Titans*, those ancient gods who signify the dark powers of primitive nature, and who had long been driven into *Tartarus* beneath a better regulated world. He endeavours to swell out his language to a gigantic sublimity, corresponding with the standard of his characters. Hence he abounds in harsh combinations and overstrained epithets, and the lyrical parts of his pieces are often obscure in the extreme, from the involved nature of the construction. He resembles *Dante* and *Shakspeare* in the very singular cast of his images and expressions. These images are nowise

deficient in the terrible graces, which almost all the writers of antiquity celebrate in Æschylus.

Æschylus flourished in the very first vigour of the Grecian freedom, after its successful struggle, and he seems to have been thoroughly imbued with a proud feeling of the superiority which this struggle reflected on the nation to which he belonged. He was an eye-witness of the greatest and most glorious event in the history of Greece, the overthrow and annihilation of the Persian hosts under Darius and Xerxes, and had fought in the memorable battles of Marathon and Salamis with distinguished bravery. In the *Persians* he has, in an indirect manner, sung the triumph which he contributed to obtain, while he paints the downfall of the Persian projects, and the ignominious return of the fugitive monarch to his royal residence. He describes in the most vivid and glowing colours the battle of Salamis. In this piece, and in the *Seven before Thebes*, a warlike vein gushes forth; the personal inclination of the poet for the life of a hero shines throughout with the most dazzling lustre. It was well remarked by Gorgias, the sophist, that Mars, instead of Bacchus, dictated this last drama; for Bacchus, and not Apollo, was the patron of tragic poets, which may appear somewhat singular on a first view of the matter, but then we must recollect that Bacchus was not merely the god of wine and joy, but also the god of the highest degree of inspiration.

Among the remaining pieces of Æschylus, we have what is highly deserving of our attention, a complete trilogy. The antiquarian account of trilogies is this, that in the more early times the poet did not contend for the prize with a single piece, but with three, which however were not always connected together by their contents, and that a fourth satirical drama was also attached to them. All these were successively represented in one day. The idea which we must form of the trilogy in relation to the tragic art is this: a tragedy cannot be indefinitely lengthened and continued, like the Homeric epic poem for example, to which whole rhapsodies have been appended; for this is too independent and complete within itself. Notwithstanding this circumstance, however, several tragedies may be connected together by means of a common destiny running throughout all their actions in one great cycle. Hence the fixing on the number three admits of a satisfactory explanation. It is the thesis, the antithesis, and the connexion. The advantage of this conjunction was that, in the consideration of the connected fables, a more ample degree of gratification was derived than could possibly be obtained from a single action. The objects of the three tragedies might be se-

parated by a wide interval of time, or follow close upon one another.

The three pieces of the trilogy of Æschylus are *Agamemnon*, the *Choephora* or *Electra*, and the *Eumenides* or *Furies*. The object of the first is the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra, on his return from Troy. In the second, Orestes avenges his father by killing his mother: *facto pius et sceleratus eodem*. This deed, although perpetrated from the most powerful motives, is repugnant however to natural and moral order. Orestes as a prince was, it is true, entitled to exercise justice even on the members of his own family; but he was under the necessity of stealing in disguise into the dwelling of the tyrannical usurper of his throne, and of going to work like an assassin. The memory of his father pleads his excuse; but although Clytemnestra has deserved death, the blood of his mother still rises up in judgment against him. This is represented in the *Eumenides* in the form of a contention among the gods, some of whom approve of the deed of Orestes, while others persecute him, till at last the divine wisdom under the figure of Minerva, reconciles the opposite claims, establishes a peace, and puts an end to the long series of crimes and punishments which desolated the royal house of Atreus.

A considerable interval takes place between the period of the first and second pieces, during which Orestes grows up to manhood. The second and third are connected together immediately in the order of time. Orestes takes flight after the murder of his mother to Delphi, where we find him at the commencement of the *Eumenides*.

In each of the two first pieces, there is a visible reference to the one which follows. In *Agamemnon*, Cassandra and the chorus prophesy, at the close, to the arrogant Clytemnestra and her paramour Ægisthus, the punishment which awaits them at the hands of Orestes. In the *Choephora*, Orestes, immediately after the execution of the deed, finds no longer any repose; the furies of his mother begin to persecute him, and he announces his resolution of taking refuge in Delphi.

The connexion is therefore evident throughout, and we may consider the three pieces, which were connected together even in the representation, as so many acts of one great and entire drama. I mention this as a preliminary justification of Shakespeare and other modern poets, in connecting together in one representation a larger circle of human destinies, as we can produce to the critics who object to this the supposed example of the ancients.

In *Agamemnon* it was the intention of Æschylus to exhibit to

us a sudden fall from the highest pinnacle of prosperity and fame, into the abyss of ruin. The prince, the hero, the general of the whole of the Greeks, in the very moment when he has succeeded in concluding the most glorious action, the destruction of Troy, the fame of which is to be re-echoed from the mouths of the greatest poets of all ages, on entering the threshold of his house, after which he has long sighed, is strangled amidst the unsuspected preparations for a festival, according to the expression of Homer, "like an ox in the stall," strangled by his faithless wife; her unworthy seducer takes possession of his throne, and the children are consigned to banishment, or to hopeless servitude.

With the view of giving the greater effect to this dreadful alternation of fortune, the poet has previously thrown a splendour over the destruction of Troy. He has done this in the first half of the piece in a manner peculiar to himself, which, however singular, must be allowed to be impressive in the extreme, and to lay fast hold of the imagination. It is of importance to Clytemnestra not to be surprised by the arrival of her husband. She has therefore arranged an uninterrupted series of signal fires from Troy to Mycenæ to announce to her that great event. The piece commences with the speech of a watchman, who supplicates the gods for a release from his toils, as for ten long years he has been exposed to the cold dews of night, has witnessed the various changes of the stars, and looked in vain for the expected signal; at the same time he sighs in secret for the internal ruin of the royal house. At this moment he sees the blaze of the long wished-for fires, and hastens to announce it to his mistress. A chorus of aged persons appears, and in their songs they trace back the Trojan war, throughout all its eventful changes of fortune from its first origin, and recount all the prophecies relating to it, and the sacrifice of Iphigenia, at the expense of which the voyage of the Greeks was purchased. Clytemnestra declares the joyful cause of the sacrifice which she orders, and the herald Talthybius immediately makes his appearance, who as an eye-witness announces the drama of the conquered and plundered city consigned as a prey to the flames, the joy of the victors, and the glory of their leader. He displays with reluctance, as if unwilling to shade the brilliancy of his picture, the subsequent misfortunes of the Greeks, their dispersion, and the shipwreck suffered by many of them, an immediate symptom of the wrath of the gods. We easily see how little the unity of place was observed by the poet, and that he rather avails himself of the prerogative of his mental dominion over the powers of nature, and adds wings to the circling hours in their course towards their dreadful goal. Agamemnon now comes, borne in a sort of tri-

umphant procession; and seated on another car, laden with booty, follows Cassandra, his prisoner of war and mistress, according to the privilege of the heroes of those days. Clytemnestra greets him with hypocritical joy and veneration; she orders her slaves to cover the ground with the most costly embroideries of purple, that it might not be touched by the foot of the conqueror. Agamemnon, with sage moderation refuses to receive an honour due only to the gods; at last he yields to their invitations, and enters the house. The chorus then begins to utter dark forebodings. Clytemnestra returns to allure Cassandra to her destruction by the art of soft persuasion. The latter remains dumb and motionless, but the queen is hardly gone, when, seized with a prophetic rage, she breaks out into the most perplexing lamentations, afterwards unveils her prophecies more distinctly to the chorus; she sees in her mind all the enormities which have been perpetrated in that house; the repast of Thyestes, which the sun refused to look on: the shadows of the dilacerated children appear to her on the battlements of the palace. She also sees the death prepared for her master, and although horror-struck at the atrocious spectacle, as if seized with an overpowering fury, she rushes into the house to meet her inevitable death; we then hear behind the scenes the sighs of the dying Agamemnon. The palace opens; Clytemnestra stands beside the body of her king and husband, an undaunted criminal, who not only confesses the deed, but boasts of it as a just requital for Agamemnon's ambitious sacrifice of Iphigenia. The jealousy towards Cassandra, and the criminal union with the unworthy Ægisthus, which is first disclosed after the completion of the murder towards the conclusion of the piece, are motives which she throws entirely into the back ground, and hardly touches on: this was necessary to preserve the dignity of the object. But Clytemnestra would have been improperly portrayed as a weak woman seduced from her duty; she appeared with the features of that heroic age so rich in bloody catastrophes, in which all the passions were violent, and in which, both in good and evil, men exceeded the ordinary standard of later and more puny ages. What is so revolting, what affords such a deep proof of the degeneracy of human nature, as the spectacle of horrid crimes conceived in a pusillanimous bosom? When such crimes are to be portrayed by the poet, he must neither endeavour to embellish them, nor to mitigate our horror and aversion. The consequence which is thus given to the sacrifice of Iphigenia has this particular advantage, that it keeps within some bounds our discontent at the fall of Agamemnon. He cannot be pronounced wholly innocent; an earlier crime recoils on his own head; and besides, according

to the religious idea of the ancients, an old curse hung over his house: Ægisthus, the contriver of his destruction, is a son of that very Thyestes on whom his father Atreus took such an unnatural revenge; and this fatal connexion is conveyed to our minds in the most vivid manner by the chorus, and more especially by the prophecies of Cassandra.

I pass over the subsequent piece of the *Choephoræ* for the present; I shall speak of it when I come to institute a comparison between the manner in which the three poets have handled the same subject.

The fable of the *Eumenides* is, as I have already said, the justification and absolution of Orestes from his bloody crime: it is a trial, but a trial where the gods are accusers, and defenders, and judges; and the manner in which the subject is treated corresponds with its majesty and importance. The scene itself brought before the eyes of the Greeks the highest objects of veneration which were known to them.

It opens before the celebrated temple at Delphi, which occupies the back ground; the aged Pythia enters in sacerdotal pomp, addresses her prayers to all the gods who presided, or still preside, over the oracle, harangues the assembled people (the actual), and goes into the temple to seat herself on the tripod. She returns full of consternation, and describes what she has seen in the temple: a man stained with blood, supplicating protection, surrounded by sleeping women with serpent hair; she then makes her exit by the same entrance. Apollo now appears with Orestes in his traveller's garb, and a sword and olive branch in his hands. He promises him his farther protection, commands him to flee to Athens, and recommends him to the care of the present but invisible Mercury, to whom travellers, and especially those who were under the necessity of concealing their journey, were usually consigned.

Orestes goes off at the side allotted to strangers; Apollo re-enters the temple, which remains open, and the furies are seen in the interior sleeping on their seats. Clytemnestra now ascends by the charonic stairs through the orchestra, and appears on the stage. We are not to suppose her a haggard skeleton, but a figure with the appearance of life, though paler, still bearing her wounds in her breast, and shrouded in ethereal-coloured vestments. She calls repeatedly to the Furies in the language of vehement reproach, and then disappears, probably through a trap-door. The Furies awake, and when they no longer find Orestes, they dance in wild commotion round the stage during the choral song. Apollo returns from the temple, and expels them from his sanctuary as profanatory beings. We may here suppose him

appearing with the sublime displeasure of the Apollo of the Vatican, with bow and quiver, or clothed in his sacred tunic and chlamys.

The scene now changes; but as the Greeks on such occasions were fond of going the shortest way to work, the back ground remained probably unchanged, and had now to represent the temple of Minerva, on the hill of Mars (Areopagus), and the lateral decorations would be converted into Athens and the surrounding landscape. Orestes comes as from another land, and embraces as a suppliant the statue of Pallas placed before the temple. The chorus (who, according to the directions of the poet, were clothed in black, with purple girdles, and serpents in their hair, the masks with something of the terrible beauty of Medusa heads, and even the age marked on plastic principles) follow him on foot to this place, but remain throughout the remainder of the piece beneath in the orchestra. The Furies had at first exhibited the rage of beasts of prey at the escape of their booty, but they now sing with tranquil dignity their high and terrible office among mortals, claim the head of Orestes as forfeited to them and consecrate it with mysterious charms of endless pain. Pallas, the warlike virgin, appears in a chariot and four at the intercession of the suppliant. She listens with calm dignity to the mutual complaints of Orestes and his adversaries, and finally undertakes, after due reflection, the office of umpire at the solicitation of the two parties. The assembled judges take their seats on the steps of the temple, the herald commands silence among the people by sound of trumpet, as at an actual tribunal. Apollo advances to advocate the cause of the youth, the Furies in vain oppose his interference, and the arguments for and against the deed are gone through in short speeches. The judges throw their calculi into the urn, Pallas throws in a white one; all are wrought up to the highest pitch of expectation; Orestes calls out full of anguish to his protector:

O Phœbus Apollo, how is the cause decided?

The Furies on the other hand:

O black night, mother of all things, dost thou behold this?

In the enumeration of the black and white pebbles, they are found equal in number, and the accused is therefore declared by Pallas acquitted of the charge. He breaks out into joyful expressions of thanks; while the Furies on the other hand declaim against the arrogance of the young gods, who take such liberties with the race of Titan. Pallas bears their rage with equanimity, addresses them in the language of kindness, and even of veneration; and these beings, so untractable in their general disposi-

tion, are unable to withstand the power of her mild and convincing eloquence. They promise to bless the land over which she has dominion, while Pallas assigns them a sanctuary in the Attic territory, where they are to be called the *Eumenides*, that is, the benevolent. The whole ends with a solemn procession round the theatre, with songs of invocation, while bands of children, women, and old men, in purple robes and with torches in their hands, accompany the Furies in their exit.

Let us now take a retrospective view of the whole trilogy. In *Agamemnon* we observe in the deed which is planned and executed, the greatest display of arbitrary will and power: the principal character is a great criminal; and the piece ends with the revolting impressions produced by the sight of triumphant tyranny and crime. I have already alluded to the circumstance of a previous destiny.

The deed in the *Choephoræ* is partly recommended by Apollo as appointment of fate, and partly originates in natural motives: the desire of avenging the father, and the fraternal love for the oppressed Electra. After the deed the struggle between the most sacred feelings first becomes manifest, and allows no repose to the distracted youth.

From the very commencement, the *Eumenides* stands on the very highest tragical elevation: all the past is concentrated as it were in one focus. Orestes has merely been the passive instrument of fate; and free agency is transferred to the more elevated sphere of the gods. Pallas is properly the principal character. The opposition between the most sacred relations, which frequently appears beyond the power of mortal solution, is represented as a contention in the world of the gods.

And this leads me to the deep import of the whole. The ancient mythology is in general symbolical, although not allegorical; for the two are quite distinct. Allegory is the personification of an idea, a fable solely undertaken with such a view; but that is symbolical which has been created by the imagination for other purposes, or which has a reality in itself independent of the idea, but which at the same time is easily susceptible of a symbolical explanation; and even of itself suggests it.

The Titans, in general, mean the dark primary powers of nature and of mind; the later gods, what enters more within the circle of consciousness. The former are more nearly related to original chaos, the latter belong to a world already subjected to order. The Furies are the dreadful powers of conscience, in so far as it rests on obscure feelings and forebodings, and yields to no principles of reason. In vain Orestes dwells on the just motives for the deed, the voice of blood resounds in his ear. Apollo

is the god of youth, of the noble ebullition of passionate discontent, of the bold daring action: hence this deed was commanded by him. Pallas is cool wisdom, justice, and moderation, which alone can allay the dispute.

Even the sleep of the Furies in the temple is symbolical; for only in the holy place, in the bosom of religion, can the fugitive find rest from the stings of his conscience. Scarcely however has he again ventured into the world, when the image of his murdered mother appears, and again awakes them. The very speech of Clytemnestra is symbolical, as well as the attributes of the Furies, the serpents, and the sucking of blood. The same may be said of the aversion of Apollo for them; in fact this symbolical application runs throughout the whole.—The equal cogency of the motives for and against the deed is denoted by the divided number of the judges. When at last a sanctuary is allotted to the softened Furies in the Athenian territory, this is as much as to say that reason shall not everywhere assert her power against the instinctive impulse, that there are certain boundaries in the human mind which are not to be passed, and which every person possessed of a sentiment of reverence will beware of touching, if he wishes to preserve inward peace.

So much for the deep philosophical import, which we are not to wonder at finding in this poet, who, according to the testimony of Cicero, was a Pythagorean. Æschylus had also his political views. The first of these was the rendering Athens illustrious. Delphi was the religious centre of Greece, and yet how it is thrown into the shade! It can only shelter Orestes from the first onset of persecution, but not afford him a complete freedom; this is reserved for the land where law and humanity flourish. His principal object however was the recommending as essential to the welfare of Athens the Areopagus,* an incorruptible yet mild

* I do not find that this aim has ever been ascribed to Æschylus by the express testimony of any ancient writer. It is however not to be mistaken, especially in the speech of Pallas, beginning with the 680th verse. This coincides with the account that in the very year when the piece was represented, Olymp. lxxx. 1. a certain Ephialtes excited the people against the Areopagus, which was the best guardian of the old and more austere constitution, and kept democratic extravagance in check. This Ephialtes was murdered one night by an unknown hand. Æschylus received the first prize in the theatrical games, but we know at the same time that he left Athens immediately afterwards, and passed his remaining years in Sicily. It is possible that, although the theatrical judges did him the justice to which he was entitled, he might be held in aversion by the multitude notwithstanding, and that this without any express sentence of banishment might have induced him to leave his native city. The story of the sight of the terrible chorus of Furies having thrown children into mortal convulsions, and caused women to miscarry, appears to me fabulous. A poet would hardly have been crowned, who had been the occasion of profaning the festival by such occurrences.

tribunal, in which the white pebble of Pallas in favour of the accused does honour to the humanity of the Athenians. The poet shows us the origin of an institution fraught with blessings to humanity, in an immense circle of crimes.

But it will be asked, are not aims of this description prejudicial to the pure poetical impression which the whole ought to produce? Most undoubtedly, in the manner in which other poets, and especially Euripides, have proceeded in such cases. But in *Æschylus* the aim is much more subservient to the poetry than the poetry to the aim. He does not lower himself to a circumscribed reality, but elevates it on the contrary to a higher sphere, and connects it with the most sublime conceptions.

In the *Orestiad* (for so the three connected pieces are called) we certainly possess one of the most sublime poems that ever was conceived by the human imagination, and probably the most mature and faultless of all the productions of his genius. The period of their composition confirms this supposition; for he was at least sixty years of age when he brought these dramas on the stage, the last which he ever submitted in competition for the prize at Athens. Every one of his pieces however which have come down to us is remarkable either for the display of some peculiar property of the poet, or as indicative of the step in the art on which he stood at the time.

I should be disposed to consider the *Suppliants* one of his more early works. It probably stood in a trilogy between two other tragedies on the same subject, the names of which are still preserved, namely the *Egyptians* and the *Danaidæ*. The first describes the flight of the *Danaidæ* from Egypt to avoid the marriage with their uncles, whom they detested; the second the protection which they sought and obtained in Argos; the third the murder of the husbands whom they were compelled to receive. We are disposed to view the contents of the two first pieces, as mere detached scenes, and introductions to the tragical action which first properly commences in the last. But tragedy on this footing was as complete, considered as one whole, as the single pieces were defective from the necessity of being taken in connexion with others. In the *Suppliants* the chorus not only takes a part in the action as in the *Eumenides*, but it is even the principal character towards whom our interest is directed. This modification of tragedy is neither favourable for the display of peculiarity of character, nor the exciting an interest by means of powerful passions; or to speak in the language of Grecian art it is neither advantageous for *ethos* nor for *pathos*. The chorus has but one voice and one soul: the dispositions common to fifty young women (for the chorus of *Danaidæ* certainly amounted to

this number) would have been placed by the display of an exclusive peculiarity in opposition with the nature of things; and therefore such a multitude could only be painted with the common features of humanity, those common to their sex and age, and those of their nation. In this last respect the will of Æschylus is more conspicuous than his performance: he lays a great stress on the foreign race of the Danaidæ; but this they only declare themselves, without allowing the foreign character to be discovered from their discourse. The sentiments, resolutions, and actions of a number of people manifested with this uniformity, and conceived and executed like the movements of a regular army, can hardly receive the appearance of what proceeds freely and immediately from the inward inclinations. We take a much stronger interest in the situation and fate of a single example with which we have become intimately acquainted, than in a multitude of uniformly repeated impressions massed together. We have more than reason to doubt whether Æschylus treated the fable of the third piece in such a way that Hypermnestra, the only one of the Danaidæ who is an exception to the rest, becomes the principal object from her compassion or her love: he probably here adopted the very same mode of expressing the complaints, the wishes, the cares, and supplications of the whole, the social solemnity of their action and suffering, in majestic choral songs.

In the same manner in the *Seven before Thebes*, the king and the messenger, whose speeches occupy the greatest part of the piece, speak more in virtue of their office, than as interpreters of personal feelings. The description of the attack with which the city is threatened, and of the seven leaders who, like the heaven-storming giants, have sworn its destruction, and who display their arrogance in the symbols borne on their shields, is an epic subject clothed in the pomp of tragedy. This long and highly-finished preparation is of less value than the single agitating moment, when Eteocles, who has hitherto displayed the utmost degree of prudence and firmness, and stationed a patriotic hero at each gate against one of the insolent enemies, as the seventh, the author of the whole mischief, Polynices is described to him, carried along by the furies of the paternal curse, insists on becoming himself the antagonist, and notwithstanding all the entreaties of the chorus, with the clear consciousness of inevitable ruin, rushes headlong to the fratricidal strife. The war is in itself no subject for tragedy, and the poet hurries us rapidly from the ominous and important preparation to the determination: the city is saved, the two competitors for the throne fall by the hands of each other, and the whole is closed by their funeral dirge, in which a part is taken by the sisters and chorus of Theban virgins. It is remarkable that

the resolution of Antigone to inter her brother, notwithstanding the prohibition, with which Sophocles opens his piece of that name, is woven into the conclusion of this, a circumstance which immediately connects it with a new developement, as in the *Choephoræ*.

I could wish to believe that Æschylus composed the *Persians* from mere complacency for Hiero King of Syracuse, who was desirous of having the great events of the Persian war brought under his review. Such is the substance of one tradition; but according to another the piece had been before exhibited in Athens. We have already alluded to this drama, which, both in point of selection of subject, and the manner of handling it, is undoubtedly the most imperfect of all the tragedies of the poet that we possess. Our expectation is hardly excited in the commencement by the vision of Atossa; the whole catastrophe immediately opens on us with the first message, and no farther progress can be even imagined. But although not a legitimate drama, we may still consider it as a proud triumphal song in honour of liberty, clothed in soft and unceasing lamentations for the fallen majesty of the vanquished. The poet with great judgment, both here and in the *Seven before Thebes*, describes the result of the battle, not as accidental, which is almost always the case in Homer, (for accident ought never to have a place in tragedy), but as the result of arrogant and blind presumption on the one hand, and resolute moderation on the other.

The *Chained Prometheus* held also a middle place between two others, the *Fire-bringing* and the *Freed Prometheus*, if we dare reckon the first, which without question was a satirical drama, as part of a trilogy. A considerable fragment of the *Freed Prometheus* has been preserved to us in the Latin translation of Attius.

The *Chained Prometheus* is the representation of constancy under suffering, and that the never-ending suffering of a god. Exiled to a naked rock on the shore of the encircling ocean, this drama still embraces the world, the Olympus of the gods, and the earth of mortals, all scarcely yet reposing in a secure state above the dread abyss of the dark Titanian powers. The idea of a self-devoting divinity has been mysteriously inculcated in many religions, as a confused foreboding of the true; here however it appears in a most alarming contrast with the consolations of revelation. For Prometheus does not suffer on an understanding with the power by whom the world is governed, but he atones for his disobedience, and that disobedience consists in nothing but the attempt to give perfection to the human race. It is thus an image of human nature itself: endowed with a miserable foresight and bound down to a narrow existence, without an ally, and with

nothing to oppose to the combined and inexorable powers of nature, but an unshaken will and the consciousness of elevated claims. The other poems of the Greek tragedians are single tragedies; but this may be called tragedy itself: its purest spirit is revealed with all the annihilating and overpowering influence of its first unmitigated austerity.

There is little external action in this piece: Prometheus merely suffers and resolves from the beginning to the end; and his sufferings and resolutions are always the same. But the poet has contrived in a masterly manner to introduce variety and progress into that which in itself was determinately fixed, and given us a scale for the measurement of the matchless power of his sublime Titans in the objects by which he has surrounded them. We have the first silence of Prometheus while he is chained down under the harsh inspection of *Strength* and *Force*, whose threats serve only to excite a useless compassion in Vulcan, who carries them into execution; then his solitary complaints, the arrival of the tender ocean nymphs, whose kind but disheartening sympathy induces him to give vent to his feelings, to relate the causes of his fall, and to reveal the future, though with prudent reserve he reveals it only in part; the visit of the ancient Oceanus, a kindred god of the race of the Titans, who, under the pretext of a zealous attachment to his cause, advises him to submission towards Jupiter, and who is on that account dismissed with proud contempt; the introduction of the raving Io, driven about from place to place, the victim of the same tyranny from which Prometheus himself suffers; his prophecy of the wanderings to which she is still doomed, and the fate which at last awaits her, connected in some degree with his own, as from her blood he is to receive a deliverer after the lapse of many ages; the appearance of Mercury as the messenger of the tyrant of the world, who with threats commands him to disclose the secret by which Jupiter may remain on his throne secure from all the malice of fate; and lastly the yawning of the earth before Prometheus has well declared his refusal, amidst thunder and lightning, storms and earthquake, by which he himself and the rock to which he is chained are swallowed up in the abyss of the nether world. The triumph of subjection was never celebrated in more glorious strains, and we have difficulty in conceiving how the poet in the *Freëd Prometheus* could sustain himself on such an elevation.

In the dramas of *Æschylus* we have one of many examples that, in art as well as nature, gigantic productions precede those that evince regularity of proportion, which again in their turn decline gradually into littleness and insignificance, and that poetry in its original appearance approaches always the nearest to

the reverence of religion, whatever form the latter may assume among the various races of men.

A saying of the poet, which has been preserved, affords us a proof that he endeavoured to maintain himself on this elevation, and purposely avoided all artificial cultivation, which might have the effect of lowering the divinity of his character. His brethren stimulated him to write a new Pæan. He answered: "The old one of Tynachus is the best, and the same thing would happen here that was observable in a comparison between the ancient and modern statues; for the former with all their simplicity were considered as divine, and the modern, with all the care bestowed on their execution, were indeed admired, but bore much less of the impression of a divinity." He carried his boldness in religious matters, as in everything else, to the utmost limits; and he was even accused of having in one of his pieces disclosed the Elcusinian mysteries, and only absolved on the intercession of his brother Amynias, who displayed the wounds which he had received in the battle of Salamis. He perhaps believed that in the poetic communication was contained the initiation into the mysteries, and that nothing was in this way revealed to any one who was not worthy of it.

The tragic style of Æschylus is still imperfect, and not unfrequently runs into the unmixed epic and lyric. It is often disjointed, irregular, and hard. To compose more regular and skillful tragedies than those of Æschylus was by no means difficult; but in the more than mortal grandeur which he displayed, it was impossible that he should ever be surpassed; and even Sophocles, his younger and more fortunate rival, did not in this respect equal him. The latter, in speaking of Æschylus, gave a proof that he was himself a reflecting artist: "Æschylus does what is right without knowing it." These few simple words exhaust the whole of what we understand by powerful genius unconscious of its powers.

The birth-year of Sophocles was nearly at an equal distance between that of his predecessor and of Euripides, so that he was about half a lifetime from each: in this all the accounts are found to coincide. He was however during the greatest part of his life the contemporary of both. He frequently contended for the tragic garland with Æschylus, and he outlived Euripides, who himself attained a good age. If I may speak in the spirit of the ancient religion, it seems that a beneficent Providence wished to evince to the human race, in the instance of this individual, the dignity and felicity of their lot, as he was endowed with every divine gift, with all that can adorn and elevate the mind and the heart, and crowned with every blessing imaginable

in this life. Descended from rich and honoured parents, and born a free citizen of the most cultivated state of Greece, such were the advantages with which he entered the world. Beauty of body and of soul, and the uninterrupted enjoyment of both in the utmost perfection, till the extreme limits of human existence; an education the most extensive, yet select, in gymnastics and music, the former so important in the developement of the bodily powers, and the latter in the communication of harmony; the sweet blossom of youth, and the ripe fruit of age; the possession and continued enjoyment of poetry and art, and the exercise of serene wisdom; love and respect among his fellow citizens, fame in other countries, and the countenance and favour of the gods: these are the general features of the life of this pious and virtuous poet. It would seem as if the gods, in return for his dedicating himself at an early age to Bacchus, as the giver of all joy, and the author of the cultivation of the human race, by the representation of tragical dramas for his festivals, had wished to confer immortality on him, so long did they delay the hour of his death; but as this was impossible, they extinguished his life at least as gently as possible, that he might imperceptibly change one immortality for another, the long duration of his earthly existence for an imperishable name. When a youth of sixteen, he was selected, on account of his beauty, to play on the lyre, and to dance in the Greek manner before the chorus of youths who, after the battle of Salamis (in which Æschylus fought, and which he has so nobly described) executed the Pæan round the trophy erected on that occasion; so that the fairest developement of his youthful beauty coincided with the moment when the Athenian people had attained the epoch of their highest glory. He held the rank of general along with Pericles and Thucydides, and, when arrived at a more advanced age, the priesthood of a native hero. In his twenty-fifth year he began to represent tragedies; twenty times he was victorious; he often gained the second place, and he never was ranked in the third. In this career he proceeded with increasing success till he exceeded his ninetieth year; and some of his greatest works were even the fruit of a still later period. There is a story of an accusation brought against him by one or more of his elder sons, of having become childish from age, because he was too fond of a grandchild by a second wife, and of being no longer in a condition to manage his own affairs. In his defence he merely read to his judges his *Œdipus in Colonus*, which he had then composed in honour of Colonus, his birth-place, and the astonished judges, without farther consultation, conducted him in triumph to his house. If it be true that the second *Œdipus* was written at so late an age,

as from its mature serenity and total freedom from the impetuosity and violence of youth we have good reason to conclude that it actually was, it affords us at once a pleasing picture of the delight and reverence which attended his concluding years. Although the various accounts of his death appear fabulous, they all coincide in this, that he departed without a struggle, while employed in his art, or something connected with it, and that, like an old swan of Apollo, he breathed out his life in song. I consider also the story of the Lacedemonian general who had fortified the burying-ground of his fathers, and who, twice exhorted by Bacchus in a vision to allow Sophocles to be there interred, despatched a herald to the Athenians on the subject, with a number of other circumstances, as the strongest possible proof of the established reverence in which his name was held. In calling him virtuous and pious, I spoke in the true sense of the words; for although his works breathe the real character of ancient grandeur, sweetness, and simplicity, of all the Grecian poets he is also the individual whose feelings bear the strongest affinity to the spirit of our religion.

One gift alone was refused to him by nature: a voice attuned to song. He could only call forth and direct the harmonious effusions of other voices; he was therefore compelled to depart from the established practice of the poet acting a part in his own pieces, and only once (a very characteristic trait) made his appearance in the character of the blind singer Thamyris playing on the cithara.

As Æschylus, who raised tragic poetry from its rude beginnings to the dignity of the cothurnus, was his predecessor; the historical relations in which he stood to Sophocles enabled the latter to avail himself of the inventions of his original master, so that Æschylus appears as the rough designer, and Sophocles as the finished successor. The more artful construction of the dramas of the latter is easily perceived: the limitation of the chorus with respect to the dialogue, the polish of the rhythmus, and the pure Attic diction, the introduction of a greater number of characters, the increase of contrivance in the fable, the multiplication of incidents, a greater degree of development, the more tranquil continuance of all the moments of the action, and the greater degree of theatrical effect given to incidents of a decisive nature, the more perfect rounding of the whole, even considered in a mere external point of view. But he excelled Æschylus in somewhat still more essential, and proved himself deserving of the good fortune of having such a preceptor, and of entering into competition with him in the same subjects: I mean the harmonious perfection of his mind, by which he fulfilled from in-

something

clination every duty prescribed by the laws of beauty, and of which the impulse was in him accompanied by the most clear consciousness. It was impossible to exceed Æschylus in boldness of conception; I am inclined however to believe that Sophocles appears only less bold from his wisdom and moderation, as he always goes to work with the greatest energy, and perhaps with even a more determined severity, like a man who knows the extent of his powers, and is determined, when he does not exceed them, to stand up with the greater confidence for his rights.* As Æschylus delights in transporting us to the convulsions of the primary world of the Titans, Sophocles on the other hand never trails himself of the gods but when their appearance is necessary; he formed men, according to the general confession of antiquity, better, that is, not more moral, or exempt from error, but more beautiful and noble than they appeared in real life; and while he took everything in the most human signification, he was at the same time aware of their superior destination. According to all appearance he was also more moderate than Æschylus in his scenic ornaments; he displayed perhaps more taste and selection in his objects, but did not attempt the same colossal pomp.

To characterize the native sweetness and affection so eminent in this poet, the ancients gave him the appellation of the Attic bee. Whoever is thoroughly imbued with the feeling of this property may flatter himself that a sense for ancient art has arisen within him; for the affected sentimentality of the present day, far from coinciding with him in this opinion, would both in the representation of bodily sufferings, and in the language and economy of the tragedies of Sophocles, find much of an unsupportable austerity.

When we consider the great fertility of Sophocles, for according to some he wrote a hundred and thirty pieces (of which however seventeen were pronounced spurious by Aristophanes the grammarian,) and eighty according to the most moderate account, we cannot help wondering that seven only should have come down

* This idea has been so happily expressed by the greatest genius perhaps of the last century, that the translator hopes he will be forgiven for here transcribing the passage: "I can truly say that, poor and unknown as I then was, I had pretty nearly as high an idea of myself and of my works, as I have at this moment, when the public has decided in their favour. It ever was my opinion, that the mistakes and blunders both in a rational and religious point of view, of which we see thousands daily guilty, are owing to their ignorance of themselves. To know myself, had been all along my constant study. I weighed myself alone; I balanced myself with others; I watched every means of information to see how much ground I occupied as a man and as a poet; I studied assiduously nature's design in my formation—where the lights and shades in my character were intended.—*Letter from Burns to Dr. Moore, in Currie's Life.*—
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to us. Chance however has so far favoured us, that in these seven pieces we find several which were held by the ancients as his greatest works, *Antigone* for example, *Electra*, and the two *Œdipus*; and these have also come down to us tolerably free from mutilation and corruption in their text. The first *Œdipus* and *Philoctetes* have been generally, without any good reason, preferred to all the others by the modern critics: the first on account of the artifice of the plot, in which the dreadful catastrophe, powerfully calculated to excite our curiosity (a rare case in the Greek tragedies,) is brought about inevitably by a succession of causes, all dependent on each other; the latter on account of the masterly display of character, the beautiful contrast observable in the three leading individuals, and the simple structure of the piece, in which, with so few persons, everything proceeds from the truest motives. But the whole of the tragedies of Sophocles are conspicuous for their separate excellencies. In *Antigone* we have the purest display of female heroism; in *Ajax* the manly feeling of honour in its whole force; in the *Trachiniae* (or, as we should name it, *the Dying Hercules*), the female levity of Dejanira is beautifully atoned for by her death, and the sufferings of Hercules are portrayed with suitable dignity; *Electra* is distinguished for energy and pathos; in *Œdipus Coloneus* there prevails the mildest emotion, and over the whole piece there is diffused the utmost sweetness. I will not undertake to weigh the respective merits of these pieces against each other: but I am free to confess that I entertain a singular predilection for the last of them, as it appears to me the most expressive of the personal feelings of the poet himself. As this piece was written for the very purpose of throwing a lustre on Athens, and the spot of his birth more particularly, he appears to have laboured it with a remarkable degree of fondness.

Ajax and *Antigone* are usually the least understood. We cannot conceive how these pieces should be continued so long after what we generally call the catastrophe. I shall hereafter submit an observation on this subject.

Of all the fables of the ancient mythology into which fate is made to enter, the story of *Œdipus* is perhaps the most ingenious; but yet there are others, as for example *Niobe*, which without such a complication of incidents are highly calculated to afford us a simple representation of human arrogance, and the punishment suspended over it by the gods, conceived on a more colossal scale, and in a grander style. The very intrigue of *Œdipus* detracts from its elevation of character. Intrigue in the dramatic sense is a complication arising from the crossing of purposes and events, and the fate of *Œdipus* affords this in a high

degree, as all that is done by his parents or himself to escape the predicted horrors serve only the more to involve him. But that which gives so grand and terrible a character to this drama, is the circumstance which, for the most part, however, is overlooked; that it is the *Œdipus* who solved the riddle of the Sphinx relating to human life, to whom his own life remains an inextricable riddle, till it is cleared up to him in the most dreadful manner when too late, and when all is irrecoverably lost. This is an admirable picture of the pretension of human wisdom, which is ever aspiring at general improvement, while the possessor knows not how to make the proper application to himself.

Notwithstanding the severe conclusion of the first *Œdipus*, we are so far reconciled to it by the violence, suspicion, and haughtiness in the character of *Œdipus*, that our feelings are not wrought up to the highest pitch of indignation against the cruelty of his fate. It was necessary in so far to sacrifice the character of *Œdipus*, who raises himself however in our estimation by his fatherly care and heroic zeal for the welfare of the people, that allow him, in his honest inquiries after the author of the crime, to hasten his own destruction. It was necessary for the sake of the contrast which his future misery exhibits, to allow him to appear before *Tiresias* and *Creon*, clothed in all the pride of regal dignity. In his earlier transactions we may already remark something of suspicion and violence; in the uneasiness he still felt at the charge of being a supposititious child, notwithstanding all the assurances of *Polybos*, and in the bloody quarrel in which he was afterwards engaged with *Laius*. This character he seems to have inherited from both his parents. The arrogant levity of *Jocasta*, which induces her to treat the oracle with derision when she conceived it was not confirmed by the event, though it is afterwards consummated in her own sufferings, was not indeed inherited by her son: he is on the contrary conspicuous throughout for the purity of his intentions; and the care and anxiety with which he fled from the predicted crime, added naturally to the poignancy of his despair, when he found that he had nevertheless committed it. His blindness is indeed dreadful, as the explanation is so very obvious; for example, when he puts the question to *Jocasta*, how did *Laius* look? and she answers he had become gray-haired, otherwise in appearance he was not unlike *Œdipus*. This is also another feature of her levity, that she should not have been struck with the resemblance to her husband, a circumstance that might have led her to recognize him as her son. On a closer dissection of the piece, we shall find the utmost propriety and circumspection in every feature of it. As we are however accustomed to extol the correctness of

Sophocles, and to boast more especially of the probability which prevails throughout this *Œdipus*, I must here remark that this very piece is a proof that on this subject the ancient artists followed very different principles from those of modern critics. For, according to the way of thinking of the latter, nothing could be more improbable than that *Œdipus* should, during such a length of time, have never inquired into the circumstances of the death of *Laius*, and that the scars on his feet, and even the name which he bore, should have excited no suspicion in *Jocasta*, &c. But the ancients did not produce their works of art for calculating and prosaic understandings; and an improbability which required dissection to be found out, and which did not appear in the course of the representation itself, passed with them for no improbability.

The diversity of character of *Æschylus* and *Sophocles* is nowhere more conspicuous than in the *Eumenides* and the *Œdipus Coloneus*, as both these pieces have the same aim. This aim is to confer glory on Athens as the sacred abode of law and humanity, where the crimes of illustrious families of other countries might, by a higher mediation, be at last propitiated; and hence an ever-during prosperity was predicted to the Athenian people. The patriotic and free-minded *Æschylus* has recourse to a judicial, and the pious *Sophocles* to a religious, proceeding. The *Œdipus Coloneus* may be styled his consecration after death; for as he was bent down by the consciousness of inevitable crimes, and lengthened misery, the gods, it would appear, were desirous of conferring on him this honour, to show that in the terrible example which they made of him, they had no intention of visiting him in particular with punishment, but merely wished to give a severe lesson to the human race. *Sophocles*, whose whole life might be called one continued worship of the gods, was particularly fond of adorning the last moments of existence with the splendour of a religious festival; and the emotion which he produces on such occasions is very different from that which the thought of morality is in general calculated to excite. That the tortured and exhausted *Œdipus* should at last find peace and repose in the grove of the *Furies*, in the very spot from which all other mortals fled with aversion and horror, he whose misfortune consisted in having done that at which every human being must shudder, without the consciousness or warning of any inward feeling to guide him; in this there is a profound and mysterious sense.

Æschylus has given us in the person of *Pallas* a more majestic representation of the Attic cultivation, presence of mind, moderation, mildness, and magnanimity; but *Sophocles*, who was so much inclined to draw down everything divine into the province

of humanity, has developed them in a more refined manner in his Theseus. He who is desirous of seeing the Grecian heroism accurately contrasted with the Barbarian, would do well to consider this character with attention.

In Æschylus, before the victim of persecution can be saved, and the land can participate in the blessings, the hellish horror of the Furies must congeal the blood of the spectator, and make his hair stand on an end, and the whole rancour of these goddesses of rage must be exhausted: the transition to their peaceful retreat is therefore the more astonishing; it seems as if the whole human race were redeemed from their power. In Sophocles however they do not even once make their appearance, but are altogether kept in the back-ground; and they are not called by their proper name, but made known to us by descriptions in which they are a good deal spared. But even this obscurity and distance, so suitable to these daughters of night, is calculated to excite in us a still dread in which the bodily senses have no part. The clothing the grove of the Furies with all the charms of a southern spring completes the sweetness of the poem; and were I to select an image of the poetry of Sophocles from his tragedies, I should describe it as a sacred grove of the dark goddesses of fate, in which the laurel, the olive, and the wine display their luxuriant vegetation, and the song of the nightingale is for ever heard.

Two of the pieces of Sophocles, agreeably to the Greek way of thinking, turn on the sacred rights of the dead, and the importance of interment; in *Antigone* the whole of the action hinges on this, and in *Ajax* it forms the satisfactory conclusion of the piece.

The female portrait of *Antigone* is characterized by great austerity, and it is sufficient of itself to put an end to all the seductive representations of Greek allurements, which of late have been so universally current. Her discontent when Ismene refuses to participate in her daring resolution; the manner in which she afterwards repulses Ismene when she repents of her weakness, borders on hardness; her silence and speeches against Creon, by which she provokes him to carry his tyrannical determination into execution, display all the steadfastness of purpose and the most masculine mind. The poet has however discovered the secret of painting the lovely affection of the female disposition in one single line, when in answer to the assertion of Creon, that Polynices was an enemy to his country, she answers:

My love shall go with thine, but not my hate.*

* This is the version of Franklin, but it does not convey the meaning of the original, and I am not aware that the English language is sufficiently flexible to admit of an exact translation. The German which, though far inferior to the

She puts a constraint on her feelings as long as possible, that she may not, by giving loose to them, render the firmness of her determination problematical. When however she is led out to an inevitable death, she pours herself out in the most tender and affecting wailings over her hard and untimely fate, and does not hesitate, though a chaste virgin, to mourn her lost bridal, and the unenjoyed blessings of the marriage state. Yet she never in a single syllable betrays any inclination for Hæmon, and not even mentions the name of that amiable youth.* It would have been betraying a weakness to have shown, after such a heroic resolution, that she had any tie which still bound her to existence; but to have relinquished those common enjoyments which the gods have scattered throughout this life, without a feeling of melancholy, would have been unsuitable to the devout sanctity of her mind. On a first review the chorus in Antigone may appear weak, as it accedes at once to the tyrannical commands of Creon, without opposition, and without even attempting to make the slightest representation in favour of the young heroine. But to exhibit the determination and the deed of Antigone in their full glory, it was necessary that she should have no support and no dependance. The very subjection of the chorus increases our impression of the irresistible nature of the royal commands. For this reason it was necessary to mingle in its concluding discourse with Antigone the most painful recollections, that she might drink the cup of earthly sufferings to the very dregs. The case is very different in Electra, where the chorus takes such an interest in the fate of the two principal characters, and encourages them to the commission of the deed, as the moral feelings are divided respecting it, whereas there is no such contention in Antigone, who could only have been deterred from her purpose by merely external fears.

After the fulfilment of the deed, and the infliction of the suffering for it, there still remains the correction of the arrogance of Creon, by which the death of Antigone is to be avenged; and the destruction of his whole family, with his own despair, could alone be a sufficient atonement for the sacrifice of so valuable a life. We have therefore the wife of the king, who is not even named before, brought at last on the stage, that she may hear the misfortune, and put an end to her existence. With the Grecian

Greek in harmony, is little behind in flexibility, has in this respect great advantage over the English; and Schlegel's "*nicht mitzuhassen, mitzubeiden bin ich da*," represents exactly Οὔτοι συγχθην ἀλλὰ συμφιλίει εἶμι.—TRANS.

* Barthelemy asserts the contrary; but the lines to which he refers, in the more correct manuscripts, and even according to the connexion of the whole passage, belong to Ismene.

feeling, it would have been impossible to have considered the poem as concluded with the death of Antigone, without a penal retaliation.

It is the same in Ajax. His arrogance, which was punished with a degrading insanity, is atoned for by the deep shame which at length drives him to self-murder. The persecution of the unfortunate man must not however be carried any farther, and when it is in contemplation to disgrace his remains by the refusal of interment, even when Ulysses interferes, whom he had looked upon as his mortal enemy, and to whom Pallas, in the dreadful introductory scene, shows the nothingness of the human race in the example of the delirious Ajax: he appears as a sort of personification of moderation, which, if it had been possessed by Ajax, would have prevented his fall.

Self-murder is frequent in the ancient mythology, especially in the part of it converted into tragedy; but it generally takes place, though not in a state of insanity, yet in a state of agitation, after a sudden calamity which leaves no room for consideration. Such self-murders as those of Jocasta, Hæmon, Eurydice, and Dejanira, appear merely in the light of a subordinate appendage in the tragical pictures of Sophocles; but the suicide of Ajax is a cool determination, a free action, and of sufficient importance to become the principal object of the piece. It is not the last fatal crisis of a slow mental malady, as is so often the case in the more effeminate modern times; still less is it that more theoretical tedium of life, founded on a conviction of its worthlessness, which induced so many of the latter Romans, on Epicurean as well as Stoical principles to put an end to their existence. Ajax is not by any unmanly despondency unfaithful to his rough heroism. His delirium is over, as well as his first inconsolable state, when he awakes to a knowledge of himself; and it is not till the most complete return to consciousness, after he has had time to measure the depth of the abyss into which he has been plunged by the divine destiny, that he contemplates his situation as ruined beyond remedy: his honour wounded by the loss of the arms of Achilles; the unfortunate termination of his vindictive rage, which in his infatuation had been wasted on defenceless flocks; he himself, after a long and reproachless heroic career, a source of amusement to his enemies, an object of derision and abomination to the Greeks, and the shame of his honoured father if he should so return to him: he decides according to his maxim, "to live gloriously or to die gloriously," and the latter course only remains open to him. Even the dissimulation, the first perhaps which he ever practised in his life, by which he quiets his companions, that he may not be disturbed in the execution of his design, must

be considered in the light of greatness of soul. He appoints Teucer guardian to his infant boy, the future consolation of his forlorn parents; and, like Cato, he does not die till he has arranged the concerns of all his family. As Antigone in her female tenderness, so even he in his wild manner seems in his last speech to feel the majesty of the light of the sun, from which he takes his final leave. His rough mind rejects all pity, and therefore excites it the more powerfully. What an image of awaking out of the tumult of passion, when the tent opens, and he sits lamenting amidst the slaughtered herds.

As Ajax, in the feeling of inextinguishable shame, is induced to form the violent resolution of throwing away life, Philoctetes on the other hand bears its wearisome load, during long years of misery, with the most persevering patience. If Ajax is honoured by his despair, Philoctetes is equally ennobled by his constancy. As the instinct of self-preservation came into collision with no moral impulse, it was proper to exhibit it in its entire strength. Nature has armed with this instinct whatever is possessed of the breath of life, and the vigour with which every hostile attack on existence is repelled is the strongest proof of its excellence. In the presence, it is true, of that human society by which he had been abandoned, and in the dependence on their superiority, Philoctetes would no more have been desirous of life than Ajax. But he finds himself alone in the midst of nature, he dreads nothing from the frightful aspect which she exhibits to him, and still even clings to the maternal bosom of the all-nourishing earth. Exiled on a desert island, tormented by an incurable wound, solitary and helpless as he is, he still by his arrows procures his food from the fowls of the forest, the rock bears alleviating plants, his cave yields him a shelter and coolness in summer, in winter he is warmed by the mid-day sun, or kindled branches; even the raging attacks of his pain at length exhaust themselves, and leave him in a refreshing sleep. Alas! it is the artificial refinements, the oppressive burden of a relaxing and deadening superfluity which render men indifferent to the value of life: when it is stripped of all foreign appendages, though borne down with sufferings so that the naked existence alone remains, still will its sweets flow from the heart at each pulsation throughout every vein of the body. This poor unfortunate man! ten long years has he struggled; and yet he still lives and cleaves to life and hope. What a force of truth there is in all this! What moves us the most however in Philoctetes is, that he, who by an abuse of power was cast out from society, so soon as it again approaches him, is exposed to a second and still more dangerous evil, that of falsehood.

The apprehension lest he might be deprived of his bow, his

last means of subsistence, would be too painful for the spectator, if he did not from the beginning entertain some suspicion that the open and sincere Neoptolemus will not be able to carry through to the end the character which he assumed so much against his will. It is not without reason after this deception, that Philoctetes turns away from men to those inanimate companions, to which the innate want of society had attached him. He calls on the island and its volcanoes to witness the fresh injustice which he has suffered; he believes that his beloved bow feels a pain in being torn from him; and at length he takes a melancholy leave of his hospitable cavern, the fountains and the wave-washed cliffs from which he so often looked in vain to the ocean: so inclined to love is the uncorrupted mind of man.

Respecting the bodily sufferings of Philoctetes and the manner of representing them, Lessing had in his *Laocoön* declared himself against Winkelmann, and Herder again has in the *Silva Criticæ** contradicted Lessing. Both the two last writers have made many excellent observations on the piece, although we must allow with Herder, that Winkelmann was correct in affirming that the Philoctetes of Sophocles suffers like Laocoön in the celebrated group, namely, with the struggling of a heroic soul never altogether overcome by the pain.

The *Trachinæ* appears to me so very inferior in worth to the other pieces of Sophocles which have come down to us, that I could wish to have some foundation for supposing that this tragedy was composed in the same age, in his school, and perhaps by his son Jophon, and that it was by mistake attributed to Sophocles. There is much both in the structure and disposition, and in the style of the piece, calculated to excite suspicion; and many critics have remarked that the introductory soliloquy of Dejanira, without any motive, is very unlike the character of the prologues of Sophocles. Although however the rules of art of the poet are observed on the whole, yet this is done in a superficial manner, and we nowhere perceive the deep mind of Sophocles. But as no one writer of antiquity appears to have doubted its authenticity, and as Cicero even cites the complaint of Hercules as from an indisputable work of Sophocles, we are compelled to content ourselves with the remark, that the tragedian has for once remained below his usual elevation.

This brings us to the consideration of a question which will still occupy the critic a great deal more in the examination of the works of Euripides: how far the invention and execution of a

* *In den Kritischen Waldern*, literally, in the Critical Forests. The Latin expression *Silva Critica* is familiar to us.—TRANS.

drama must belong to one man, that he may pass for its author. Dramatic literature affords numerous examples of plays composed by several persons in common. It is well known that Euripides, in the execution of his pieces, availed himself of the assistance of Kephisophon, a learned servant; and he perhaps also consulted with him respecting his plots. It appears certain however that in Athens there had then been formed dramatic schools of art, of such a character as usually arise when poetical talents are called into exercise by public competition, and with great fulness and preparation: schools of art which contain scholars of such excellence and of such kindred genius, that the master may confide a part of the execution, and even the plan, to them, and yet allow the whole to pass under his name without any injury to his fame. Such were the schools of painting of the sixteenth century, and every one knows what a remarkable degree of critical acumen is necessary to discover in many of Raphael's pictures how much of them properly belongs to himself. Sophocles had educated his son Jophon to the tragic art, and he could easily therefore receive assistance from him in the execution of his pieces, especially as it was necessary that the tragedies that were to compete for the prize should be ready and got by heart by a certain day: he might also on the other hand execute occasional passages for the works originally planned by the son; and the pieces of this description, in which the hand of the master was perceivable, would be naturally attributed to the more celebrated name.

LECTURE V.

Euripides—His merits and defects—Decline of tragic poetry through him—Comparison between the *Choephoræ* of Æschylus, the *Electra* of Sophocles, and that of Euripides—Character of the remaining works of the latter—The satirical drama—Alexandrian tragic poets.

WHEN we consider Euripides by himself, without any comparison with his predecessors, when we take a separate view of some of his better pieces, and detached scenes throughout the others, we cannot refuse to him an extraordinary degree of praise. But on the other hand when we place him in connexion with the history of art, when we consider his pieces as a whole, and reflect on the object which he appears in general to have had in view in all the works which have come down to us, we are compelled to bestow severe censure on him on various accounts. Of few writers may both good and evil be said with so much truth. He was a man of infinite ingenuity, and practised in the greatest variety of mental arts; but neither the sublime seriousness of mind, nor the severe wisdom, which we revere in Æschylus and Sophocles, regulated in him a luxuriant fulness of the most splendid and amiable qualities. His constant aim is to please by whatever means: and hence he is so very unequal to himself: frequently he has passages of the most overpowering beauty, and at other times he sinks into the most downright common-place. With all his errors he possesses an admirable ease and lightness, and a certain insinuating power which it is difficult to withstand.

These preliminary observations I have judged necessary, as it might otherwise be objected to me that I am at variance with myself, having a short time ago, in a small French treatise, endeavoured to show the superiority of a piece of Euripides, compared with an imitation of Racine. There I fixed my attention on a detached drama, and that one of the best of the works of this poet; but here I consider everything from the most general points of view, and with a reference to the highest demands of art, and must therefore justify my enthusiasm for ancient tragedy by a keen examination into the traces of its degeneracy and decline, that my predilection may not appear blind and extravagant.

We may compare a perfection in art and poetry to the summit of a steep mountain, where a load forced up with labour cannot long remain, but immediately rolls down the other side. It descends according to the laws of gravity with quickness and ease, and is seen with satisfaction; for the mass follows its natural in-

clination, while the laborious ascent is in some degree a painful spectacle. Hence it happens, for example, that the paintings of periods during which art was on the decline are much more pleasing to the unlearned eye, than those which preceded the period of its perfection. The genuine connoisseur, on the other hand, will rank the pictures of a Zuccheri and others, who gave the tone when the great schools of the sixteenth century degenerated into empty and superficial mannerism, far below the works of a Mantegna, Perugino, and their contemporaries, in real and essential worth. Or let us suppose the highest perfection of art a focus: at an equal distance on the nearest and farthest side, the collected rays occupy the same space, but on this side they labour together in producing one common effect; whereas on the other they fly asunder, till at last they are altogether lost.

We have besides a particular reason for censuring without reserve the errors of this poet: namely, that our age is infected with the same vices with those which procured for Euripides so much favour, if not real respect, from his contemporaries. In our times we have seen a number of plays which, though in substance and form far below those of Euripides, bear yet in so far a resemblance to them, that they seduce and corrupt the feelings by means of effeminate, and sometimes even tender, emotions, while their general tendency is to produce a true moral licentiousness.

What I shall say on this subject will not, for the most part, possess even novelty. Although the moderns have not unfrequently preferred Euripides to his two predecessors, and have unquestionably read, admired, and imitated him much more: whether attracted by the greater affinity of views and sentiments, or led astray by an opinion of Aristotle which they have not understood; it so happens however that many of the ancients, some of them even the contemporaries of Euripides, were of the same opinion with myself. In Anacharsis we find this mixture of praise and censure at least alluded to, though the author softens everything for the sake of his object of showing the Grecian productions of every description in the most advantageous light.

We possess some cutting sayings of Sophocles respecting Euripides, though he was so far from being actuated by anything like the jealousy of authorship, that he mourned his death, and, in a piece which was shortly after exhibited, refused to his actors the ornament of the floral crown. I consider myself warranted in viewing the accusation of Plato against the tragic poets, that they gave men too much up to the dominion of the passions, and rendered them effeminate by putting extravagant lamentations in the mouths of their heroes, as directed against Euripides alone; for with respect to his predecessors the injustice of them would

have been universally evident. The derisory attacks of Aristophanes are well known, though not sufficiently understood and appreciated. Aristotle bestows on him ~~many~~ a severe censure, and when he calls Euripides the most tragic of poets, he by no means ascribes to him the greatest perfection in the tragic art in general, but merely alludes to the effect which is produced by unfortunate catastrophes; for he immediately adds: "although he does not regulate other things well." The Scholiast of Euripides, too, contains many a short and forcible criticism on particular pieces, among which are perhaps preserved several of the opinions of the Alexandrian critics, those critics of whom Aristarchus, one of the number, from his judgment and acuteness, has had his name handed down to posterity, as a by-word for a literary judge.

In Euripides we no longer find the essence of the ancient tragedy in its pure and unmixed state; its characteristic features are already in part extinguished. We have already placed this essence in the prevailing idea of destiny, in the ideality of the composition, and in the signification of the chorus.

Euripides inherited, it is true, the idea of destiny from his predecessors, and his belief of it was sharpened by the tragic practice; but yet in him fate is seldom the invisible spirit of the whole composition, the radical thought of the tragic world. We have seen that this idea may be exhibited under severer or milder aspects; that the obscure terror of destiny may, in the connexion of a whole trilogy, be cleared up to the signification of a wise and beneficent providence. Euripides however has drawn it down from the region of the infinite; and inevitable necessity not unfrequently degenerates in him into the caprice of accident. He can no longer therefore give it its proper and peculiar direction, namely, by contrast and opposition, to elevate the moral liberty of man. How few of his pieces turn on the constant struggle with the decrees of fate, or even on a heroic subjection to them! His characters generally suffer because they must, and not because they will.

The mutual subordination of character and passion to ideal elevation, which we find observed in the same order in Sophocles, and in the plastic artists of the Greeks, Euripides has completely reversed. Passion is the principal object with him; his next care is for character, and when these endeavours leave him still any remaining room, he occasionally seeks to connect grandeur and dignity with the more frequent display of amiable attractions.

It has been already admitted that the persons in tragedy ought not to be all equally exempt from error, as there would then be no opposition among them, and consequently no room for a plot. But Euripides has, as Aristotle observes, frequently painted his

character in black colours without any necessity, as for example, his Menelaus in *Orestes*. He was warranted by the traditions sanctioned by popular belief, in attributing great crimes to many of the old heroes, but he invented besides many base and paltry traits for them of his own free inclination. It was by no means the object of Euripides to represent the race of heroes as towering above the men of his own age by their gigantic stature; he rather endeavours to fill up, or to build over, the chasm between his contemporaries and that wonderful world of old, and to surprise the gods and heroes in their undress, a mode of observation, it is usually said, of which no greatness can stand the test. He introduces his spectators to a sort of familiar acquaintance with them; he does not draw the supernatural and fabulous into the circle of humanity (which we praised in Sophocles,) but within the limits of imperfect individuality. This is the meaning of Sophocles, when he said that he himself painted men as they ought to be, and Euripides as they actually were. Not that his own persons are always represented as models of irreproachable behaviour; his opinion referred merely to ideal elevation and sweetness in character and manners. It seems as if Euripides was always well pleased to be enabled to say to his spectators, See! those beings were men, had exactly the same weaknesses, and acted from the same motives as yourselves, and even the lowest among you. He paints therefore with particular love and complacency the defects and moral failings of his characters, and he even allows them to make a disclosure of them in naive self-confessions.—They are frequently not merely undignified, but they even boast of their imperfections.

The chorus is for the most part in him an unnecessary ornament: its songs are frequently wholly episodic, without any reference to the action, and more distinguished for brilliancy than for sublimity and true inspiration. "We must consider the chorus," says Aristotle, "as one of the actors, and as a part of the whole; it must enter into the action: not as in Euripides, but as Sophocles has done." The ancient comic writers enjoyed the privilege of allowing the chorus occasionally to address the spectators in its own name; this was called a parabasis, and, as I shall afterwards show, was suitable to the spirit of comedy. Although the practice is by no means tragical, it was however, according to the testimony of Julius Pollux, frequently adopted by Euripides in his dramas, who so far forgot himself on some of those occasions, that, in the *Danaidæ* for instance, the chorus, which consisted of females, made use of grammatical inflexions which belonged only to the male sex.

This poet has thus at the same time destroyed the internal

sence of tragedy, and sinned against the laws of beauty and proportion in its external structure. He generally sacrifices the whole to the effect of particular parts, and in these he is also more ambitious of foreign attractions than of genuine poetical beauty.

In the accompanying music, he adopted all the innovations invented by Timotheus, and selected those melodies which were most in unison with the effeminacy of his poetry. He proceeded in the same manner with his syllabic measures; his versification is luxuriant and breaks through every rule. The same diluted and effeminate character would, on a more profound investigation, be unquestionably found to belong also to the rhythm of his choral songs.

On all occasions he exhibits to satiety those charms that are merely of a corporeal nature, which Winkelmann calls a flattery of the coarse external senses; whatever is calculated to excite, to strike, and to produce a strong effect without true worth for the mind and the feelings. He labours for effect in a degree which cannot be allowed to the tragic poet. For example, he hardly ever omits an opportunity of throwing his characters into a sudden and useless terror; his aged persons are always complaining of the wants and helplessness of age, and crawl with trembling joints up the ascent from the orchestra to the stage, which frequently represented the declivity of a mountain, sighing over the misery of their situation. He is always endeavouring to move, and for the sake of emotion he not only violates probability but even the connexion of his pieces. He is strong in his pictures of misfortune; but he often claims our compassion, not for the inward agony of the soul, nor for pain which the suffering individual endeavours to overcome, and to bear with manly fortitude, but for the unreserved expression of bodily misery. He is fond of reducing his heroes to the condition of beggars, of allowing them to suffer hunger and want, of exhibiting them with all the external signs of mendicity, and displaying their tattered rags, as Aristophanes has so humourously remarked in his *Acharnæ*.

Euripides was a frequenter of the schools of the philosophers, (he was a scholar of Anaxagoras, and not of Socrates, as many have erroneously stated, having only been connected with the latter by social intercourse;) and he displays a particular vanity in introducing philosophical doctrines on all occasions, in my opinion in a very imperfect manner, as we should not be able to understand these doctrines from him if we were not before acquainted with them. He conceives it too vulgar a thing to believe in the gods in the simple manner of the people, and he

therefore seizes every opportunity of interspersing something of their allegorical signification, and of giving his spectators to understand that the nature of his own belief was very problematical. We may distinguish in him a twofold character: the poet whose productions were consecrated to a religious solemnity which existed under the protection of religion, and which was therefore under a reciprocal obligation of returning that protection with honour and reverence; and the sophist with his philosophical *dicta*, who endeavoured to introduce his sceptical opinions and doubts into the fabulous prodigies connected with the religion from which he derived the subjects of his pieces. But while he shakes the groundworks of religion, he acts at the same time the moralist; and for the sake of popularity he applied to the heroic life, and the heroic ages what could only be suitable to the social relations of his contemporaries. He throws out a multitude of moral maxims, many of which he often repeats, and for the most part they are either trite, or fundamentally false. With all this moral ostentation, the aim of his pieces, the general impression which they are calculated to produce is sometimes extremely immoral. An anecdote is told of him, that he introduced Bellerophon with a silly eulogium on wealth, in which he preferred it to all domestic happiness, and ended with observing, if Aphrodite (who bore the appellation of the golden) shone like gold, she was deserving of the love of mortals; and that the spectators took umbrage at this, raised a loud outcry, and wished to stone both actor and poet. Euripides then sprang forward, and called out! "Wait only till the end, he will be requited accordingly!" In like manner he defended himself against the objection that his Ixion expressed himself in too disgusting and abominable language, by observing that the piece concluded with his being broken on the wheel. But the assistance of poetical justice in punishing the baseness of his characters is not always called in. In some of his pieces the wicked escape altogether untouched. Lies and other infamous practices are openly protected, especially when he can assign for them a supposed noble motive. He has also very much at his command the seductive sophistry of the passions, by which an appearance can be lent to everything. The following verse in justification of perjury, and in which the *reservatio mentalis* of the casuists seems to be substantially expressed, is well known:

The tongue swore, but the sense swore not.

In the connexion in which this verse is uttered, and on account of which he was so often ridiculed by Aristophanes, there is in-

deed a justification; but the formula is nevertheless, on account of the possible abuse of its application. Another verse of Euripides: "For the sake of power it is worth while to commit injustice, but in other respects we must be just;" was frequently in the mouth of Cæsar, with the like intention of making a bad application of it.

Euripides was frequently condemned by the ancients for his seductive invitations to the enjoyment of sensual love. Every man must be disgusted when Hecuba, for the sake of inducing Agamemnon to punish Polymestor, reminds him of the pleasures which he has enjoyed in the arms of Cassandra his captive and mistress, according to the laws of the heroic ages: she wishes to purchase the avenging her murdered son with the sanction and humiliating confession of the degradation of her living daughter. He was the first poet who ever thought of making the unbridled passion of a Medea, and the unnatural love of a Phædra, the principal subject of his dramas, as from the manners of the ancients we may easily conceive why love, which with them was less honoured by tender feelings, should appear to hold only a subordinate rank in their older tragedies. With all this importance which he has communicated to his female parts, he is notoriously famed for his hatred of women; and it is impossible to deny that he abounds in passages displaying the weaknesses of the female sex, and the superiority of men, to whom he evidently endeavoured by that means to pay court, as though the latter were not the whole of his audience, they yet constituted by far the greater part of it. A cutting saying and an epigram of Sophocles, on this subject, have been preserved, in which he accounts for the misogyny of Euripides from his having had ample occasion to become acquainted with their powers of seduction by his own illicit inclinations. In the manner in which women are painted by Euripides, we may observe upon the whole a great deal of sensibility, even for the more noble charms of female modesty, but no true respect.

The substantial freedom with respect to the manner of treating the fables, which was one of the prerogatives of the tragic art, is frequently carried by Euripides to the most licentious extreme. We know that the fables of Hyginus, which differ so essentially from those which are generally received, were partly extracted from his pieces. As he frequently rejected all the circumstances which were generally known, and to which the people were accustomed, he was reduced to the necessity of explaining in a prologue the situation of things in his drama, and the course which they take. Lessing, in his *Dramaturgie*, has pronounced a singular enough opinion; he thinks that it is a proof of an

advance in the dramatic art, that Euripides gave himself wholly up to the effect of situations, without calculating on the excitement of curiosity. But I cannot see why the uncertainty of expectation, amidst the impressions which a dramatic poem produces, should not be allowed a legitimate place in such a work. The objection that a piece will only please in this manner for the first time, because on an acquaintance with it we know the result beforehand, may be easily answered: if the representation is at all powerful, it will always arrest the attention of the spectator in such a manner, that he will forget what he already knew, and be again excited to the same height of expectation. Moreover, these prologues give the commencement of the pieces of Euripides a very uniform and monotonous appearance; nothing can have a more awkward effect than for a person to come forward and say, I am so and so; this and that has happened, and the following will still take place. It resembles the labels in the mouths of the figures in old pictures, which could only be excusable in the great simplicity of style in ancient times. But then all the rest ought to correspond, which is by no means the case with Euripides, where the characters always discourse in the latest tone of the then existing manners. Both in his prologues and catastrophes he is exceedingly liberal of insignificant appearances of the gods, who are only elevated above men by the machine in which they are suspended, and whom we should never otherwise suspect for divinities.

The manner of the ancient tragedians, who combined everything in large masses, and exhibited repose and motion distinctly contrasted with each other, was carried by him to an unwarrantable extreme. At one time, for the sake of giving spirit to his dialogue, he carries the practice observed by his predecessors, of giving a succession of speeches in single verses, to such an immoderate length, that questions and answers, or objections and reflections, fly about like arrows, and many of them so unnecessary that the half of these lines might well be spared. At another time he pours himself out in endless speeches, where he endeavours to give a brilliant display of his oratorical powers in ingenious arguments, or in the excitation of compassion. Many of his scenes have altogether the appearance of a lawsuit, where two persons opposed to each other, with a third for a judge, do not even confine themselves to what their situation requires, but expatiate in a wide field, accusing their adversary, and defending themselves with all the turns and involutions which are usual with advocates and sycophants. In this manner the poet endeavours to make his poetry entertaining to the Athenians, from its resemblance to their favourite daily occupation of conducting,

deciding, or at least listening to, lawsuits. Hence Quintillian expressly recommends him to the young orator, and with great justice, as capable of furnishing him with more instruction than the older tragedians. But such a recommendation is by no means highly honourable to him; for eloquence may no doubt have place in the drama when it is suited to the character and the object of the person who speaks; but if rhetoric supplies the place of the immediate expression of emotion, it ceases to be poetical.

The style of Euripides is upon the whole too loose, although he has many happy images and ingenious turns: it has neither the dignity nor the energy of the style of Æschylus, nor the chaste sweetness of that of Sophocles. In his expressions he frequently affects the singular and uncommon, though at other times he becomes too familiar, and the tone of the discourse assumes a confidential appearance, and descends from the elevation of the cothurnus to the level ground. In this respect, as well as in the picture of several characteristic peculiarities, bordering on the ludicrous (for instance, the unsuitable behaviour of Pentheus in a female dress, the gluttony of Hercules, and his immoderate claims on the hospitality of Admetus), Euripides was a precursor of the new comedy, to which he had an evident inclination, as he frequently paints the men and manners of his own times under the names of the heroic ages. Hence Menander expressed a most marked admiration for him, and proclaimed himself his scholar; and we have a fragment of Philemon which displays such an extravagant admiration, that it hardly appears to have been seriously meant. "If the dead," he either himself says, or allows one of his characters to say, "were still to have feeling, as some people suppose, I should hang myself for the sake of seeing Euripides."—The opinion of Aristophanes, his contemporary, forms a striking contrast with this adoration of the latter comic authors. Aristophanes persecutes him unceasingly with the utmost bitterness; he seems as if he were appointed to be his constant scourge, that none of his moral or poetical extravagances might remain unpunished. Although Aristophanes, as a comic poet, is, generally speaking, in the relation of parody to the tragedians, yet he never attacks Sophocles, and even where he takes the part of Æschylus, at which we can hardly help smiling, his reverence for him is still visible, and he takes every opportunity of contrasting his gigantic powers with the petty refinement of Euripides. He has exposed the sophistical subtlety, the rhetorical and philosophical pretensions, the immorality and seductive effeminacy, and the excitations to undisguised sensuality, of Euripides, with all the powers of understanding, and with an inexhaustible flow of wit. As the modern critics have generally

however considered Aristophanes in no other light than an extravagant and libellous farce writer, and have not been able to understand the truths which he veiled under his amusing disguises, they have paid little attention to his opinion.

Notwithstanding these observations, we must never forget that Euripides was still a Grecian, and the contemporary of many of the greatest names of Greece in politics, philosophy, history, and the plastic arts. If, on comparing him with his predecessors, we must rank him far beneath them, he appears still great when placed by the side of many of the moderns. He has a particular strength in portraying the errors of a diseased soul, pursuing even to madness the passions of which it is the slave. He is admirable where the object calls chiefly for emotion, and requires the display of no higher qualities; and he is still more so where pathos and moral beauty are united. Few of his pieces are without particular passages of the most overpowering beauty. It is by no means my intention to deny him the possession of the most astonishing talents; I have only stated that these talents were not united with a mind in which the austerity of moral principles, and the sanctity of religious feelings, were held in the highest honour.

The relation in which Euripides stood to his two great predecessors, may be placed in the clearest light by a comparison of the three pieces which we fortunately possess on the same subject, namely, the avenging murder of Clytemnestra by her son Orestes.

The scene of the *Choephoræ* of *Æschylus* is before the royal palace; the grave of Agamemnon appears on the stage. Orestes is seen with his faithful Pylades, and opens the play (which is unfortunately somewhat mutilated at the commencement), at the sepulchre with a prayer to Mercury, and with an invocation to his father, in which he promises to avenge him, and to whom he consecrates a lock. He sees a female train in mourning weeds issue from the palace, who bring a libation to the grave; and, as he thinks he recognizes his sister among them, he retires with Pylades that he may first overhear them. The chorus, which consists of captive Trojan women, reveals with mournful gestures the occasion of its mission, namely, a dreadful dream of Clytemnestra; it adds obscure forebodings of the impending revenge for the bloody crime and bewails its lot in being obliged to serve unworthy superiors. Electra asks the chorus if they mean to fulfil the commission of her hostile mother, or if they are to pour out their offering in silence; and in compliance with their advice, she also offers up a prayer to the subterranean Mercury and the soul of her father, in her own name and that of the absent Orestes,

that he may appear and avenge him. In pouring out the offering she joins in the lamentations of the chorus for the departed. She then conjectures, from finding a lock of hair resembling her own in colour, and seeing footsteps near the grave, that her brother has been there; and when she is almost frantic with joy at the thought her brother steps forward and discovers himself. He soon overcomes her doubts by exhibiting to her a tissue woven by herself: they give themselves up to their joy; he addresses a prayer to Jupiter, and makes known that Apollo has called on him, under the most dreadful threats of persecution from the furies of his father, to destroy those who were guilty of his death in the same manner in which he was destroyed, namely by guile and cunning. We have now hymns on the part of the chorus and Electra; which consist of prayers to her father's shade and the subterranean divinities, and a recapitulation of the motives for the deed, especially those derived from the death of Agamemnon. Orestes inquires into the vision which induced Clytemnestra to offer the libation, and hears that she dreamt that she gave her breast to a dragon in her son's cradle, and suckled it with her blood. He now resolves to become the dragon, and announces more distinctly his intention of stealing into the house as a disguised stranger, and attacking both her and Ægisthus by surprise. With this view he withdraws along with Pylades. The subject of the next choral hymn is the boundless audacity of men in general, and especially of women in their illicit passions, confirmed by the most terrible mythical examples, and the avenging justice which always at last overtakes them. Orestes returns as a stranger with Pylades, and desires admission into the palace. Clytemnestra comes out, and when she learns from him the death of Orestes, at which Electra assumes a feigned grief, she invites him to enter and partake of their hospitality. After a short prayer of the chorus, the nurse comes and mourns her foster child; the chorus inspires her with some hopes of his being still in life, and advises her to contrive to bring Ægisthus to Clytemnestra without his body-guard. On the approaching aspect of danger, the chorus proffers prayers to Jupiter and Mercury for the success of the deed. Ægisthus enters in conversation with the messenger, can hardly allow himself to be persuaded of the truth of the joyful news of the death of Orestes, and hastens into the house for the purpose of ascertaining it, from whence, after a short prayer of the chorus, we hear the cries of the murdered. A servant rushes out, and gives the alarm at the door of the female dwelling, to warn Clytemnestra. She hears it, comes forward, and demands an axe to defend herself; but as Orestes rushes instantaneously on her with the bloody sword, her courage fails her, and she holds up to him the

maternal breast in the most moving manner. Hesitating in his purpose, he asks the counsel of Pylades, who in a few lines exhorts him by the most cogent reasons to persist; after an alternation of accusation and defence, he pursues her into the house, that he may sacrifice her beside the body of Ægisthus. The chorus rejoices in a grave hymn at the completion of the retaliation. The great door of the palace opens, and exhibits in the inside the two dead bodies on one bed. Orestes orders the servants to unfold the capacious vestment in which his father was entangled when he was slain, that it may be seen by all the beholders; the chorus recognize the bloody spots in it, and mourn afresh the murder of Agamemnon. Orestes, while he feels that his mind is becoming confused, lays hold of an opportunity of justifying himself; he declares his intention of repairing to Delphi to purify himself from the bloody deed, and flies with terror from the furies of his mother, whom the chorus does not perceive, but conceives to be a mere phantom of his imagination, but who nevertheless will no longer allow him any repose. The chorus concludes with a reflection on the threefold scene of murder, in the royal palace, since the repast of Thyestes.

The scene of the *Electra of Sophocles* is also laid before the palace, but does not contain the grave of Agamemnon. At break of day Pylades, Orestes, and the guardian by whom he was preserved when his father was slain, enter the stage as arriving from another country. The tutor who acts as his guide commences with a description of his native city, and he is answered by Orestes who mentions the commission of Apollo, and the manner in which he intends to carry it into execution, after which the young man puts up a prayer to his domestic gods and his father's house. Electra is heard complaining within; Orestes is desirous of greeting her without delay, but the old man leads him away to perform a sacrifice at the grave of his father. Electra then appears, and pours out her sorrow in a pathetic address to heaven, and her unconquerable desire of revenge in a prayer to the infernal deities. The chorus, which consists of native virgins, endeavours to console her; and, in an interchange of hymns and conversation, Electra discloses her deep sorrow, the ignominy and oppression under which she suffers, and her hopelessness from the delay of Orestes, whom she has frequently admonished; and she turns a deaf ear to all the grounds of consolation adduced by the chorus. Chrysothemis, the youngest daughter of Clytemnestra, whose yieldingness of disposition naturally renders her the favourite of her mother, approaches with a mortuary offering which she is carrying to the grave of her father. An altercation arises between the two sisters respecting their difference of sentiment, and Chryso-

themis mentions to Electra that Ægisthus, whom she sets at defiance, and who is at that time absent in the country, has determined to adopt the most severe measures towards her. She then learns that Clytemnestra dreamt of the return of Agamemnon to life, of his having planted his sceptre in the ground on which the house stood, which grew up to a tree that overshadowed the whole land; and, alarmed at this, that she has commissioned Chrysothemis to carry an oblation to his grave. Electra counsels her not to execute the commands of her audacious mother, but to put up a prayer for herself and her sister, and for the return of Orestes to revenge her father, when she reaches the grave; she adds to the oblation her own girdle and a lock of her hair. Chrysothemis goes off, promising obedience to her wishes. The chorus predicts from the dream, that retaliation is at hand, and connects the crimes in the house of Pelops, with the first enormity committed by that ancestor. Clytemnestra rebukes her daughter, against whom however she is milder than usual, probably from the effect of the dream; she defends her murder of Agamemnon, Electra condemns her for it, but yet no violent altercation takes place. Clytemnestra then proffers a prayer at the altar before the house to Apollo for health and long life, and in secret for the death of her son. The guardian of Orestes arrives, and, as the messenger of a Phocæan friend, announces the death of Orestes, and minutely enumerates all the circumstances which attended his being killed in a chariot-race at the Pythian games. Clytemnestra can scarcely conceal her triumphant joy, although she is at first visited by the feelings of a mother, and she invites the messenger to partake their hospitality. Electra, in affecting speeches and hymns, gives herself up to her grief, and the chorus in vain endeavours to console her. Chrysothemis returns from the grave, full of joy in the assurance that Orestes is in the vicinity: she has found his lock of hair, his libation, and garland. The despair of Electra is now renewed; she recounts to her sister the gloomy relation of the supposed messenger, and exhorts her, as all their hopes are at an end, to join in the daring deed of destroying Ægisthus, a determination which Chrysothemis, who does not possess resolution enough, rejects as foolish; and after a violent altercation she enters the house. The chorus now bewails Electra, who is thus left altogether destitute. Orestes returns with Pylades and several servants bearing an urn with the pretended ashes of the deceased. Electra supplicates him for the urn, and laments over it in the most affecting language, which agitates Orestes to such a degree that he can no longer conceal himself: after some preparation he discloses himself to her, and confirms his account by the production of the seal-ring of their father. She

gives expression to her boundless joy in speeches and odes, till the guardian comes out, and reprimands both of them for their want of consideration. Electra with some difficulty recognizes in him the faithful servant to whom she had entrusted the care of Orestes, and expresses her gratitude to him. At the suggestion of the guardian, Orestes and Pylades accompany him with all speed into the house, that they may surprise Clytemnestra while still alone. Electra offers up a prayer for them to Apollo; the choral ode announces the moment of retaliation. We hear in the house the cries of the affrighted Clytemnestra, her short prayer, her wailings, when she feels herself wounded. Electra from without stimulates Orestes to complete the deed, and he comes out with bloody hands; as the chorus however sees Ægisthus advancing, he re-enters the house in haste for the purpose of surprising him. Ægisthus inquires into the death of Orestes, and is led to believe from the ambiguous language of Electra that his corpse is in the palace. He commands all the gates to be thrown open, immediately, for the purpose of convincing those inhabitants who yielded obedience with reluctance to his sovereignty, that they had no longer any hopes in Orestes. The middle entrance opens, and exhibits in the interior of the palace a body lying on the bed covered over: Orestes stands beside the body, and invites Ægisthus to uncover it; and he now beholds the bloody corpse of Clytemnestra, and concludes himself lost beyond remedy. He requests to be allowed to speak, but this is opposed by Electra. Orestes constrains him to enter the house, that he may kill him on the very spot where his own father was murdered.

The scene of the *Electra* of Euripides is not in Mycenæ, but on the borders of the territory of Argos, in the open country, and before a solitary and miserable cot. The owner, an old countryman, comes out and relates in a prologue to the spectators the concerns of the royal house, as already in part related, with the addition however, that not contented with treating Electra with ignominy, and leaving her in a state of celibacy, they had forced her to marry beneath her rank, and to accept of him for a husband: the motives for this proceeding, as stated by him, are singular enough; he affirms however that he entertains too much respect for her to reduce her to the humiliation of becoming in reality his wife.—They live therefore in a virgin marriage. Electra comes before it is yet break of day, bearing a water pitcher upon her head, and with her hair close cut in the servile manner: her husband entreats her not to torment herself with labours like these to which she had not been accustomed, but she will not be withheld from the discharge of her duty as the mis-

tress of a house; and both separate, he to his field-labours, and she to her occupations. Orestes now enters with Pylades, and discloses in a speech to him, that he had already sacrificed at the grave of his father, but durst not enter the town, and that he wished to discover his married sister, whom he knew to dwell somewhere at hand on the frontiers, that he might learn from her the state of affairs. He sees Electra approach with the water pitcher, and retires. In an ode she laments her own fate and that of her father. The chorus, consisting of rustic virgins, makes its appearance, and exhorts her to take part in a festival of Juno, which she however in her poverty and depression, pointing to her ragged clothes, will not consent to. The chorus offer to lend her their festal ornaments, but she still refuses. She perceives Orestes and Pylades in their hiding-place, takes them for robbers, and wishes to escape into the house; when Orestes steps forward and prevents her, she imagines he intends to murder her; he tranquillizes her, and communicates the news of Orestes being in life. On this he inquires into her situation and the spectators are again refreshed with an account of the whole circumstances. Orestes still restrains from disclosing himself, promises however to communicate any message from Electra to her brother, and testifies such an interest in her situation, as might be expected from a stranger. The chorus on this occasion becomes impatient to learn something from the city; and Electra after describing her own distress, paints the luxury and arrogance of her mother and Ægisthus, who amuse themselves with coursing over Agamemnon's grave, and throwing stones at it. The peasant returns from labour, and finds it rather indecorous that his wife should be prating with young men, but when he hears that they bring news of Orestes, he invites them in a friendly manner into his house. Orestes, on witnessing the behaviour of the worthy man, makes the reflection that the most respectable people are frequently to be found in low stations, and in lowly garb. Electra upbraids her husband on account of the invitation, as he knew they had nothing in the house; he is of opinion that the strangers will be satisfied with what he has, that a good housewife can always make the most of things, and that they have at least more than a day's provisions. She despatches him to the old guardian and deliverer of Orestes, who lives in the country beside them, that he may come and bring something with him to entertain the strangers. The peasant, as he leaves them, utters sentences respecting riches and moderation. The chorus soar in an ode to the expedition of the Greeks to Troy, describe at great length the figures of a shield, which

Achilles received from Thetis, and conclude with expressing a wish that Clytemnestra may be punished for her audacious crime.

The old guardian, who with no small difficulty mounts up to the house, brings Electra a lamb, a cheese, and some wine; he then begins to weep, and does not fail to wipe his eyes with his tattered garments. To the questions of Electra he answers, that at the grave of Agamemnon he found traces of an oblation and a lock of hair, and thence he conjectured that Orestes had been there. We have then an allusion to the means which in *Æschylus* are made to lead to the discovery, the resemblance of the locks, the print of the feet, and the tissue, with a refutation of them. The probability of this part of the drama of *Æschylus* may perhaps admit of justification, and at all events we are disposed to overlook it; but the express reference to another representation of the same subject, is the most foreign and destructive to genuine poetry of all measures that can possibly be conceived. The guests come out; the old man considers Orestes with attention, recognizes him, and convinces Electra by a scar above his eyebrow which he received from a fall (a most noble invention, which he substitutes in place of that of *Æschylus*,) that he is her brother; they embrace one another, and give themselves up to their joy during a short choral ode. In a long dialogue, Orestes, the old man, and Electra, form a plan for the execution of the deed. The old man informs them that *Ægisthus* is at present in the country sacrificing to the nymphs, and there Orestes resolves to steal as a guest, and to fall on him. Clytemnestra, from a dread of the unpleasant language which she might be obliged to hear, has not accompanied her husband; and Electra undertakes to entice her mother to make her appearance, by the false report of her being in child-bed. The brother and sister now join in prayers to the gods for a successful issue of their plan. Electra declares that she will put an end to her existence if it fails, and that she will keep a sword in readiness for that purpose. The old man goes off with Orestes to conduct him to *Ægisthus*, and afterwards to repair to Clytemnestra. The chorus sings the golden ram, which *Thyestes*, by the assistance of the faithless wife of *Atreus*, was enabled to carry off from him, and the repast of his own children, with which he was punished in return; a sight at which the sun turned aside from his course; but this circumstance, however, the chorus very wisely adds, that it was very much inclined to call in question. Groans and tumultuous voices are heard at a distance; Electra conceives that her brother has been overcome, and determines on killing herself. But immediately a messenger arrives, who gives a long-

winded account of the destruction of Ægisthus, interlarded with many a joke. Amidst the rejoicings of the chorus, Electra crowns her brother with flowers, who holds the head of Ægisthus by the hair in his hands. She in a long speech upbraids this head with its follies and crimes, and among other things observes to it: no man will ever thrive who marries a woman with whom he formerly lived in illicit intercourse; that it is indecorous when a woman obtains the mastery in a house, &c. Clytemnestra is seen to approach; Orestes begins to have scruples of conscience respecting his intention of murdering his mother, and the propriety of obeying the oracle, but yields to the arguments of Electra, and agrees to execute his purpose within the house. The queen arrives drawn in a chariot sumptuously hung with tapestry, and surrounded by Trojan slaves; Electra wishes to assist her in alighting, but this she refuses. She then urges the sacrifice of Iphigenia as a justification of her conduct towards Agamemnon, and calls even upon her daughter to state her reasons against the act, that an opportunity may be given to the latter of delivering a subtle discourse, in which, among other things, she reproaches her mother with having, during the absence of Agamemnon, sat too much before her glass, and paid greater attention to her dress than was proper. Clytemnestra is not angry, although her daughter does not hesitate to announce the intention of murdering her if possible; she makes inquiries respecting the child-birth, and enters the hut that she may perform the sacrifice of purification. Electra accompanies her with a speech of derision. On this the chorus begins an ode on the retaliation: the cries of Clytemnestra are heard, and the brother and sister come out stained with blood. They are full of repentance and despair at the deed which they have committed, become agitated by a repetition of the miserable language and gestures of their mother, Orestes determines on flight, and Electra asks: who will now take her in marriage? Castor and Pollux, their uncles, appear in the air, abuse Apollo on account of his oracle, command Orestes to secure himself from the furies by submission to the tribunal of the Areopagus, and predict a number of events which will happen to him. They then establish a marriage between Electra and Pylades; her first husband is to go to Phocis, where he is to be richly provided for. After a renewal of their lamentations, the brother and sister take leave of one another for life, and the piece concludes.

We easily perceive that Æschylus has viewed the subject in its most terrible aspect, and drawn it within the dominion of the dark divinities, into which he so willingly entered. The grave of Agamemnon is the obscure point, from which the vindictory retaliation of Agamemnon issues; his discontented shade, the soul

of the whole poem. The external imperfection so easily remarked, that the piece remains too long at the same point, without any perceptible progress, is atoned for by a true internal perfection: for it is the boding stillness of expectation before a storm or an earthquake. It is true the prayers are sometimes repeated, but their number produces the impression of a great and unheard of purpose, for which human strength and human motives are not alone sufficient. In the murder of Clytemnestra, and her heart-rending appeal, the poet has gone to the very extremity of what may be allowed to feeling, without taking the part of the criminal. As the crime which is to be punished is from the very beginning kept in view by the grave, it is brought still nearer to our minds towards the conclusion, by the exhibition of the vestment: Agamemnon, after being fully avenged, is as it were still murdered in representation. The flight of Orestes betrays no unsuitable repentance or weakness, but is merely the inevitable tribute which he is forced to pay to offended nature.

It is only necessary to draw the attention generally to the admirable arrangement of Sophocles. What a beautiful introduction precedes, in him, the mission of the queen to the grave, with which Æschylus at once begins! How beautifully he has adorned the relation of the Pythian games! What wonderful judgment in the prolongation of the pathos of Electra: first her general lamentations, then the hopes which she derives from the dream, the annihilation of these hopes by the news of the death, the new and rejected hopes of Chrysothemis, and lastly her wailings over the urn. The heroism of Electra is beautifully contrasted with the irresolution of her sister. The poet has given altogether a new turn to the subject, by making Electra the chief object of our interest. In this noble pair he has given to the female an unshaken constancy in true and noble sentiments, and the heroism of suffering, and to the male he has imparted all the becoming energy of a young hero. The circumspection and experience of the old man are again opposed to their youthful warmth; that Pylades in the works of both poets is silent, is a proof how much in ancient art everything unnecessary and superfluous was held in aversion.

But that which more particularly characterizes the tragedy of Sophocles, is the celestial purity, the fresh breath of life and youth, which is diffused over so dreadful a subject. The bright divinity Apollo, who commanded the deed, appears to have shed his influence over it; even the break of day at the commencement is significant. The grave, and the world of shadows are kept in the distance: what in Æschylus is effected by the spirit of the murdered monarch, proceeds here from the mind of the

still existing Electra, which is endowed with an equal capacity for inextinguishable hatred and ardent love. The disposition to avoid everything dark and ominous, is remarkable even in the very first speech of Orestes, when he says it does not grieve him to be reputed dead, when he feels himself alive in the fulness of health and strength. He is neither beset with doubts nor stings of conscience, either before or after the deed, so that here the purpose is more determined than in Æschylus; and the appalling scene with Ægisthus, and the reserving him for an ignominious execution, is conceived with more austerity than in the other drama. The nocturnal vision of Clytemnestra affords the most striking image of the relation which the two poets bear to each other: both are equally suitable, significant, and ominous; that of Æschylus is grander, but appalling to the senses, that of Sophocles majestically beautiful, even in terror.

The piece of Euripides affords a singular example of poetic, or rather unpoetic, perversity; we should never have done, were we to attempt to point out all the improbable and unnecessary circumstances, and all the contradictions, which are contained in it. Why, for instance, does Orestes fruitlessly torment his sister so long without disclosing himself? The poet has an easy task, when he has nothing more to do than to throw aside whatever stands in his way, as in the case of the peasant, of whom, after the departure of the guardian, we have no farther account. For the sake of appearing original, and from an idea, that to make Orestes kill the king and queen in the middle of their capital was not consistent with probability, Euripides has involved himself in much greater improbabilities. Whatever there is of tragical in his drama is not his own, but belongs either to the fable or the labour of his predecessors. It becomes no tragedy in his hands, but is wrought down to a family picture, in the modern signification of the word. The effect produced by the poverty of Electra is pitiful in the extreme: the poet has betrayed his secret in the contentment with which she bears her wretchedness. All the preparations for the deed are marked by levity, and a want of internal conviction: it is downright torture to exhibit Ægisthus displaying a good-natured hospitality, and Clytemnestra sympathizing with her daughter, that even compassion may be excited in their favour; the deed, immediately after the execution, is again extinguished by the most weak repentance, a repentance which arises from no moral feeling, but merely from a commotion of the senses. I shall say nothing of his abuse of the oracle of Delphi. As it has destroyed the whole drama, I cannot see why Euripides should have written it, except to provide a fortunate marriage for Electra, and to reward the peasant for

his forbearance. I could wish that the marriage of Pylades had been completed, and that a sum of money had been paid to the peasant; and then everything would have ended to the satisfaction of the spectators, as in an ordinary comedy.

That I may not however appear unjust, I must confess that the *Electra* is perhaps the very worst of his whole pieces. Was it the rage for novelty that led him into such an error? He was truly to be pitied for having been preceded in the same subject by two such men as Sophocles and Æschylus. But who compelled him to measure his powers with them, and to think even of writing an *Electra*?

We can give only a short account of some of the great number of pieces of Euripides, which have come down to us.

On the score of beautiful morality, there is none of them perhaps so deserving of praise as *Alceste*. Her determination to die, and the farewell which she takes of her husband and children, are represented with the most overpowering pathos. His moderation in not allowing the heroine to speak on being brought back from the world below, that he might not draw aside the mysterious veil from the condition of the dead is deserving of high praise. *Admetus* it is true, and more especially his father, sink too much in our estimation from their selfish love of life; and *Hercules* appears, at first, coarse even to rudeness, afterwards more noble and worthy of himself, and at last jovial, when, for the sake of the joke, he introduces to *Admetus* his veiled wife as a new bride.

Iphigenia in Aulis is a subject peculiarly suited to the inclinations and powers of Euripides; the object here is to excite a tender emotion for the innocent and unsuspecting youth of the heroine: but *Iphigenia* is still far from being an *Antigone*. Aristotle has already remarked that the character is not sustained: "Iphigenia, when she implores her life, by no means resembles the *Iphigenia* who afterwards yields herself up a willing sacrifice."

Ion is also one of his most delightful pieces, on account of the pictures of innocence and priestly sanctity in the boy whose name it bears. In the course of the plot, it is true, there are not a few improbabilities, deficiencies, and repetitions; and the catastrophe produced by a falsehood, in which both gods and men unite against *Xuthus*, can hardly be satisfactory to our feelings.

In the representation of female passions, and the errors of a diseased mind, the *Phædra* and *Medea* have been deservedly praised. The former of these pieces dazzles us by the sublime and beautiful heroism of *Hippolytus*; and it is also deserving of the highest recommendation on account of the observation of propriety and moral strictness, in a subject of so critical a nature.

This however is not so much the merit of the poet as the result of the delicacy of feeling of his contemporaries; for the *Hippolytus* which we possess, according to the testimony of the scholiast, is an improvement upon an earlier one, in which there were traits of a repulsive and censurable nature.*

The commencement of *Medea* is admirable; her desperate situation is depicted in the conversation between her nurse and the tutor of her children, and in her own heart-rending wailings behind the scene. As soon however as she makes her appearance, the poet takes care to cool our agitation by the number of general and common-place reflections which he puts into her mouth. She appears still less deserving of our respect in the scene with *Ægeus*, in which, having in contemplation a terrible revenge on Jason, she first secures to herself a place of refuge, and seems almost on the point of hinting at a new alliance. This is very unlike the daring criminal who subjected the powers of nature to a subserviency to her ungovernable passions, and who flew from land to land like a desolating meteor;—the *Medea* who, abandoned by all the world, found sufficient resources in herself. Nothing but a predilection for Athenian antiquities could induce Euripides to adopt this cold substitution. He would otherwise have painted, in the most vivid colours, the union in the same person of the powerful enchantress and the weak woman, in her sexual relations. As it is we are keenly affected by the display of maternal tenderness in the midst of the preparations for the cruel deed. She announces however her purpose much too soon, and in too definite a manner, instead of allowing us to guess at her intentions from the ominous expressions which might escape from a dark and perturbed mind. When she executes it, the impulse of revenge on Jason ought to have been already sufficiently gratified by the ignominious death of his young wife and her father; and the new motive that Jason would infallibly murder the children, and that she must therefore anticipate him, will by no means bear examination: for she could as easily have saved the living children with herself, as have carried off their dead bodies in the dragon-chariot. Still however this may perhaps be justified by the perturbation of mind into which she was plunged by the completion of the crime.

* The learned and acute Brunck, without citing any authority, or the coincidence of a fragment in corroboration, says that Seneca in his *Hippolytus* followed the plan of the first of Euripides which was called the *Veiled Hippolytus*.—How far this was mere conjecture I cannot say, but yet I should be inclined to doubt whether Euripides, even in the drama which was censured, admitted the scene of the declaration of love, which Racine however has not hesitated to adopt from Seneca into his *Phædra*.

Such a picture of universal sorrow, of the fall of flourishing families and states from the greatest glory to the lowest necessity, and even to entire annihilation, as that which is exhibited in the *Troudes*, might obtain for Euripides, from Aristotle, the name of the most tragic of poets. The conclusion, when the captive women, allotted to their different masters, leave Troy in flames behind them, and proceed towards the ships, is truly grand. It is impossible however for a piece to have less action, in the energetical sense of the word: it is a series of situations and events which have no other connexion than that they are all derived from the conquest of Troy, but they have in no respect a common aim. The accumulation of helpless suffering, without even an opposition of sentiment, at last wearies us, and exhausts our compassion. The greater the effort to avert a calamity, the greater the impression it afterwards produces, when it bursts through the restraint. But when so little concern is shown, as is here the case with *Astyanax*, for the speech of *Talthybius* himself does not betray the slightest attempt to save him, the spectator soon acquiesces in like manner. In this way Euripides frequently fails. In the uninterrupted demands on our compassion in the piece, the pathos is not duly economized, and gradually heightened; for instance, the lamentation of *Andromache* for her living son is much more heart-rending than that of *Hecuba* for her son that is dead. The effect of the latter is however supported by the aspect of a small corse in the shield of *Hector*. Much was calculated on the visual attractions of the piece: hence *Helen* appears splendidly dressed for the sake of contrast with the captive slaves, *Andromache* is mounted on a chariot laden with spoils; and I doubt not but that, at the conclusion, the whole decorations were exhibited in flames. The trial of *Helen* interrupts our compassion by an idle altercation, which ends in nothing; for notwithstanding the accusation of *Hecuba*, *Mene-laüs* abides by the resolution which he had before formed. The defence of *Helen* may be considered as capable of affording nearly the same degree of entertainment which we derive from the sophistical eulogium of *Isocrates* in her favour.

It was not enough for Euripides to have represented *Hecuba* throughout a whole piece in sackcloth and ashes, and pouring out her lamentations; he has still introduced her as the principal figure in another tragedy, which bears her name. The two actions of this piece, the sacrifice of *Polyxena*, and the revenge of *Polymestor*, on account of the murder of *Polydorus*, have nothing in common with each other but their connexion with *Hecuba*. The first half possesses great beauties of the kind in which Euripides is chiefly successful: pictures of tender youth, female

innocence, and noble resignation to an early and violent death. A human sacrifice, the triumph of barbaric superstition, is represented as executed, suffered, and beheld, with that 'Hellenism of feeling, which among the Greeks effected at so early a period the abolition of such sacrifices. But the second half destroys these soft impressions in a highly repulsive manner. It is filled with the revengeful artifices of Hecuba; the blind avarice of Polymestor, and the paltry politics of Agamemnon, who dares not venture on calling the Thracian king to account, but who nevertheless delivers him into the hands of his captive women. Neither is it very suitable that Hecuba, advanced in years, bereft of strength, and overwhelmed with sorrow, should display so much presence of mind in the execution of her revenge, and such a command of her tongue in her accusation and her derision of Polymestor.

We have another example of two distinct and separate actions in the same tragedy, the *Raging Hercules*. The first is the oppression of his family during his absence, and their deliverance through his return; the second, his repentance after the sudden madness, during which he murdered his wife and children. The two actions follow, but by no means arise out of one another.

The *Phœnissæ* is rich in tragical events, in the common acceptance of the word: the son of Creon, to save the town, precipitates himself from the walls; Eteocles and Polynices perish by the hands of each other; Jocasta falls by her own hand over their dead bodies; the Argives who advance against Thebes are destroyed in battle; Polynices remains uninterred; and lastly, Œdipus and Antigone are driven out to banishment.—After this enumeration, the scholiast remarks the arbitrary manner in which the poet has proceeded. "This drama," says he, "is beautiful in theatrical representation, because it is full of foreign incidents. Antigone looking down from the walls has nothing to do with the action, and Polynices, under the protection of a cessation of hostilities, enters the town without any effect being thereby produced. Among these superfluities, the addition of the exiled Œdipus, with a loquacious ode, is pre-eminently without an object." This is a severe sentence, but it is just.

The scholiast on *Orestes* is not more lenient: "The piece is one of those which produce a great effect on the stage, but which is extremely defective in the characters; for, with the exception of Pylades, all the rest are worth nothing." Moreover, "It has a catastrophe more suitable to comedy than tragedy." This drama begins indeed in the most agitating manner. Orestes, after the murder of his mother, is represented lying on his bed, afflicted with anguish of soul and delirium; Electra sits at his

feet, and she and the chorus remain in trembling expectation of his awaking. Afterwards however everything takes a perverse turn, and ends with the most forced theatrical contrivances.

The piece of *Iphigenia in Taurus*, in which the fate of Orestes is still further followed out, appears less wild and extravagant, but it seldom rises above mediocrity in the representation either of character or passion. The mutual recognition of brother and sister, after such adventures and actions, when Iphigenia, who formerly herself trembled at the bloody altar, was on the point of yielding up her brother to a similar fate, does not however produce more than a transient emotion. The flight of Orestes and his sister is not highly calculated to excite our interest: the artifice by which it is effected by Iphigenia is willingly credited by Thoas, who does not attempt to give any opposition, till both are safe, and then he is reduced to silence by an ordinary appearance of the gods towards the conclusion. This means has been so used and abused by Euripides, that of his eighteen tragedies, in nine of them a divinity descends for the full unraveling of the catastrophe.

In *Andromache* Orestes makes his appearance for the fourth time. The scholiast, in whose opinions we think that we can generally recognize the sentiments of the most important of ancient critics, declares this a piece of the second rank in which he can only praise single scenes. Among those which Racine has adopted as the foundation of his free imitations, we can have no difficulty in recognizing the very worst parts of the work, and therefore the French critics have an easy victory in their endeavours to depreciate the Grecian predecessor, from whom Racine has in fact derived little more than the first suggestion of his tragedy.

The Bacchantæ represent the infectious and tumultuous inspiration of the worship of Bacchus, with great sensual power and vividness of conception. The obstinate disbelief of Pentheus, his blindness, and dreadful punishment by the hands of his own mother, form a bold picture. The effect on the stage must be extraordinary.—Imagine, only, a chorus with flying and dishevelled hair and dresses, tambourines, cymbals, &c. in their hands, like the Bacchantæ on bas-reliefs, raving up and down the orchestra, and executing their inspired dances amidst tumultuous music, which was altogether unusual, as the choral odes were generally delivered with a solemn step, and without any other accompaniment than a flute. Here the luxuriance of ornament, which Euripides always affects, was for once in its proper place. When therefore several of the modern critics attempt to depreciate this piece, and to assign to it a very low rank, they do not seem to me to know what they themselves would wish. I cannot help

admiring in the composition of this piece, the harmony and unity which we so seldom observe in Euripides, the abstinence from everything foreign to the subject, so that all the effects and all the motives flow from one source, and contribute to one object. After *Hippolytus*, I should be inclined to assign the first place to this among all the remaining works of Euripides.

The *Heraclidæ* and the *Supplices* are true occasional tragedies, and could only be successful from their flattery of the Athenians. They celebrate two ancient heroic deeds of Athens, on which the eulogistic orator, Isocrates, who always mixed up the fabulous with the historical, lays an astonishingly great stress: the protection of the children of Hercules, the ancestors of the Lacedæmonian kings, from the persecution of Eurystheus, and the interment of the Seven before Thebes and their army, gained in favour of Adrastus, king of Argos, by a victory over the Thebans. The *Supplices* were represented, as we know, during the Peloponnesian war, after the conclusion of a treaty between the Argives and the Lacedæmonians: this piece was intended to recal to the memory of the Argives their ancient obligation to Athens, and to show how little they could hope to prosper in the war against the Athenians. The *Heraclidæ* was undoubtedly written with a similar view in respect to Lacedæmon. Of the two pieces however, which are both cast in the same mould, the Female Suppliants, so called from the mothers of the vanquished and fallen heroes, is by far the richest in poetical merit; the *Heraclidæ* appears, as it were, but a faint impression of the other. In the former piece, it is true, Theseus appears at first in a very unamiable light, as he upbraids the unfortunate Adrastus with his errors at too great length, and perhaps without much justice, before he condescends to assist him; the contest between Theseus and the Argive herald, respecting the precedence of monarchical or democratical constitutions, is justly banished from the stage to the school of rhetoricians; and the moral eulogium of Adrastus over the fallen heroes is very much out of character. I am convinced that Euripides had here an intention of drawing the characters of particular Athenian generals, who had fallen in some battle. In a dramatic point of view however the passage will not admit of this justification; but without such an object it would have been silly and ridiculous, in describing those heroes of the age of Hercules, a Capaneus for instance, who set even heaven itself at defiance, to have launched out into the praise of their civic virtues. How much Euripides was disposed to wander out of his subject in quest of foreign allusions, even allusions to himself, we may see from a speech of Adrastus, who without any cause is made to say, "It is not just that the poet, while he delights others with his works, should himself suffer inconvenience."

However, the funeral dirges and the swansong of Evadne are affectingly beautiful, although Evadne, in a literal sense, is introduced into the drama altogether unexpectedly.

The *Heracleidæ* is a very poor piece, and singularly bad towards the conclusion. We hear nothing more of the sacrifice of Macaria, after it is over: as the determination seems to cost herself no struggle, it makes as little impression upon others. The Athenian king, Demophon, does not return again; neither does Iolaus, the companion of Hercules and tutor of his children, whose youth is so wonderfully renewed: Hyllus, the heroic son of Hercules, never even makes his appearance; and nobody at last remains but Alcmene, who keeps quarrelling with Eurystheus. Euripides seems to have taken a particular pleasure in drawing such implacable and revengeful old women: he has exhibited Hecuba twice in this light, opposed to Helen and Polyxena. The constant recurrence of the same means and motives is a sure symptom of mannerism. We have in the works of this poet three examples of the sacrifice of females, which are moving from their resignation: Iphigenia, Polyxena, and Macaria; the voluntary death of Alceste and Evadne, belong also in some sort to this class. Supplicants are in like manner a favourite subject with him, where the spectator is oppressed with apprehension lest they should be forcibly torn from the sanctuary of the altar. I have already dwelt upon the introduction of deities towards the conclusion.

The most entertaining of all tragedies is *Helen*, a marvellous drama, full of wonderful adventures and appearances, which are evidently much more suited to comedy. The invention on which it is founded is, that Helen remained concealed in Egypt (so far the assertion of the Egyptian priests went), while Paris carried off an airy shape, which bore a resemblance to her, and about which the Greeks and Trojans fought with one another for ten years. By this contrivance the virtue of the heroine is saved, and Menelaus, in confirmation of the ridicule cast by Aristophanes on the beggary of the heroes of Euripides, appears in a ragged eleemosynary state, and is represented as perfectly satisfied. But this manner of improving mythology bears a resemblance to the Tales of the Thousand and One Nights.

Modern philologists have dedicated voluminous treatises, to prove the illegitimacy of *Rhesus*, the subject of which is taken from the eleventh book of the *Iliad*. Their opinion is, that the piece contains such a number of improbabilities and contradictions, that it is altogether unworthy of Euripides. But this is by no means a legitimate conclusion. Are not the faults which they censure unavoidably derived from the selection of a subject, so very inconvenient as a nightly enterprise? In a question respect-

ing the legitimacy of any work, our concern is not so much with its merit or demerit, as whether its style and peculiarities bear a resemblance to those of the pretended author. The few words of the scholiast amount to a very different opinion: "Some have considered this drama as illegitimate, and not the production of Euripides, for it bears more traces of the style of Sophocles. But it is inscribed in the *Didascalizæ* as legitimate, and the accuracy with respect to the appearances of the starry heaven betrays Euripides." I imagine I understand also what is meant by the style of Sophocles, which I do not indeed find in the general disposition, but in detached scenes. Hence, if the piece is to be taken from Euripides, I should be disposed to attribute it to an eclectic imitator, but rather of the school of Sophocles than of Euripides, and only a little later than the period of both. This I infer from the familiarity of many of the scenes, as tragedy was then inclining to the civic or familiar drama; for at a still later period in the Alexandrian time, it fell into an opposite error, that of bombast.

The *Cyclops* is a satirical drama. This is a mixed and secondary species of tragic poetry, which we have already in passing alluded to. The want of some relaxation for the mind, after the stern severity of tragedy, appears to have given rise to the satirical drama, as well as to afterpieces in general. The satirical drama never possessed an independent existence; it was given as an appendage to several tragedies, and from all that we can conjecture was always considerably shorter. In external form it resembled tragedy, and the materials were in like manner mythological. The distinctive mark was a chorus consisting of satyrs, who accompanied such heroic adventures as were of a more cheerful hue, (many in the *Odyssey* for instance; for here also, as in many other respects, the germ is to be found in Homer,) or could be made to wear such an appearance, with lively songs, gestures, and movements. The immediate cause of this species of drama was derived from the festivals of Bacchus, where satyr-masks were a common disguise. In mythological stories, with which Bacchus had no concern, these constant attendants of his were, no doubt, in some sort arbitrarily introduced, but still not without a degree of propriety. As nature, in her original freedom, appeared rich in wonderful productions to the fancy of the Greeks, they could with propriety people the wild landscapes, far from polished cities, where the scene was usually laid, with that sensual and gay sylvan creation. The compositions of demi-gods and demi-beasts, forming an amusing contrast. We have an example in the *Cyclops* of the manner in which the poets proceeded in such subjects. It is not without amusement, though the real substance of it is nearly all contained in the *Odyssey*;

only the pranks of Silenus and his band appear a little coarse now and then. We must confess that the greatest merit of this piece, in our eyes, is its rarity, as it is the only remaining thing of its kind which we possess. In these satirical dramas, Æschylus must without doubt have displayed more boldness and meaning in his mirth; as for instance, when he made Prometheus bring down his heavenly fire to the rude and stupid race of mortals; and Sophocles, as we may conjecture from the few samples we have, must have been more elegant and moral, when he introduced the goddesses contending for the prize of beauty, or Nausicaa, when she offered her protection to the shipwrecked Ulysses. It is a striking feature of the light way of living of the Greeks, of the hilarity of disposition, so foreign to everything like stately dignity, which led them to admire whatever was suitable and agreeable in art, even in things of the least importance, that in this drama called *Nausicaa*, or the *Washers*, where according to Homer the princess at the end of the washing recreates herself with her maids in playing at ball, Sophocles himself appeared playing at ball, and by his grace in this bodily exercise acquired much applause. The great poet, the respected Athenian citizen, the man who had already perhaps been a general, appeared publicly in female clothing, and as, on account of the feebleness of his voice, he could not play the principal part of Nausicaa, he acted perhaps the mute under part of a maid, for the sake of giving the slight ornament of bodily activity to the representation of his piece.

The history of ancient tragedy ends with Euripides, although there were a number of still later tragedians; *Agathon* for instance, whom Aristophanes describes as breathing ointment, and crowned with flowers, and who is represented by Plato in his *Symposion*, a discourse in the taste of the sophist Gorgias, as abounding in the most exquisite ornaments, and the most dazzling antitheses. He commenced with mythology, as the natural materials of tragedy, and occasionally wrote pieces with fictitious names, (a transition towards the new comedy) one of which was called the *Flower*, and was probably therefore neither seriously affecting nor terrible, but in the style of the idyl.

The Alexandrian literati also occupied themselves with composing tragedies; but were we to judge of them from the only piece which has come down to us, the *Alexandra* of *Lycophron*, which consists of an endless prophetic monologue, overlaid with an obscure mythology, these productions of subtlety and artifice must have been extremely inanimate, and untheatrical, and altogether destitute of interest. The creative powers of the Greeks were so completely exhausted, that they were under the necessity of repeating the works of their ancient masters.

LECTURE VI.

The old comedy proved to be completely a contrast to tragedy—Parody—
 Ideality of comedy the reverse of that of tragedy—Mirthful caprice—Allegoric and political signification—The chorus and its parabases—Aristophanes—
 His character as an artist—Description and character of his remaining works—
 A scene translated from the *Acharnæ* by way of Appendix.

WE now leave tragic poetry for the consideration of a species of an entirely opposite description, *the old comedy*. Striking as this diversity is, we shall however commence with pointing out a certain symmetry of contrast between them, which may have a tendency to exhibit the essential character of both in a clearer light. In forming a judgment of the old comedy, we must banish every idea of what is called comedy by the moderns, and what went by the same name among the Greeks themselves at an after period. These two species of comedy differ from each other, not only in accidental peculiarities (such as the introduction of real names and characters in the old), but in the most essential characteristics. We must also guard ourselves against considering the old comedy as the rude commencement of a branch of the drama, which was afterwards carried to a higher degree of perfection,* an idea which many, from the unbridled licentiousness of the old comic writers, have allowed themselves to entertain. The first however is much more entitled to the appellation of the genuine poetical species; and the new comedy, as I shall show in the sequel, is a falling off into prose and reality.

We shall form the best idea of the old comedy, in considering it as the complete contrast to tragedy. This was probably the meaning of the assertion of Socrates, which is mentioned by Plato towards the end of his Symposium. He tells us that, after the other guests had dispersed or fallen asleep, Socrates continued awake with Aristophanes and Agathon, and that while he drank with them out of a large cup, he forced them to confess, though unwillingly, that it was the business of one man to be equally

* This is the sense in which the section of Barthlemy, in *Anacharsis* on the old comedy is composed: one of the poorest and most erroneous parts of his work. With the pitiful arrogance of ignorance, Voltaire pronounced a sweeping condemnation of Aristophanes, (in his Philosophical Dictionary, under the article *Athée*) and the modern French critics have for the most part followed his example. We may however find the foundation of all the erroneous opinions of the moderns on this subject, and the same prosaical mode of viewing it, in the comparison between Aristophanes and Menander, in Plutarch.

master of tragic and comic composition, and that the tragic poet, in virtue of his art, was also a comic poet. This was not only repugnant to the general opinion, which wholly separated the two kinds of talent, but also to experience, as no tragic poet had ever attempted to distinguish himself in the comic department, or *vice versa*; and the reason of this is evident from their essential characters. The Platonic Socrates says, at another time, on the subject of comic imitation: we can only become acquainted with things of opposite characters through each other, and consequently we can only know what is laughable and ludicrous by knowing also what is serious. If the divine Plato had been pleased to communicate his own thoughts, or those of his master, respecting the manner of carrying the sentiments of their dialogue into execution, we should undoubtedly have been relieved from the necessity of the following investigation.

One view of the relation of comic to tragic poetry may be comprehended under the idea of parody. This parody however was infinitely more powerful than that of the comic epopée, as the subject parodied was brought much more vividly before the mind by means of scenic representation, than the epopée, in which the transactions of a distant age were related as already past. The subject of the comic parody was a recent action, and as the representation took place on the same stage where the spectators were accustomed to see its grave model, this must have contributed very much to heighten the effect. It happened also that not merely single scenes, but the ~~very~~ form of tragic composition was parodied, and the parody not only extended to the poetry, but also to the music and dancing, to the acting, and the scenic decorations. Nay, even when the drama trod in the footsteps of the plastic arts, it was still the subject of comic parody, as the ideal figures of deities were evidently transformed into caricatures.* The more the productions of all these arts came within the operation of the external senses, the more the Greeks, in popular festivals, religious ceremonies, and solemn processions, were accustomed to, and familiar with, the noble style which was the native element of tragic representation, so much the more irresistibly ludicrous must have been the effect of the general parody of the arts, which it was the object of comedy to exhibit.

But this idea does not exhaust the essential character of comedy: for parody always supposes a reference to the subject which is parodied, and a necessary dependence on it. The old comedy however is a species of poetry as independent and original as tra-

* As an example of this, I may allude to the well-known vase-figures, where Mercury and Jupiter are represented as comic-masks, meditating the descent by a ladder to Alcmena.

gedy itself; it stands upon an equal elevation, that is, it extends as far beyond the limits of reality into the regions of a creative fancy.

Tragedy is the most serious description of poetry, and comedy altogether sportive. Seriousness consists, as I have already observed in the introduction, in the direction of the mental powers to an object, and the limitation of their activity to that object. The opposite quality therefore consists in the apparent want of aim, and freedom from all restraint in the exercise of the mental powers; and it is therefore the more perfect, the greater the scale on which these powers are exhibited, and the more vivid the appearance of this want of aim, and of the prevalence of whim and caprice. Wit and raillery may be employed in a sportive manner, but they are also both of them compatible with the most austere earnestness, as is proved by the example of the later Roman satires, and the ancient Iambic poetry of the Greeks, where these means are made subservient to the expression of hatred and discontent.

The new comedy, it is true, represents what is laughable in character, and in the contrast of situations and combinations; and it is the more comic the more it is distinguished by a want of aim: misconceptions, erroneous notions, the fruitless efforts of ludicrous passion, especially if the whole at last terminates in nothing; but still with all this mirth, the form of the representation itself is serious, and regularly connected with a certain aim. In the old comedy the form was sportive, and was characterized by an apparent whim and caprice; the whole production was one entire jest on a large scale, which again contained a world of separate jests within itself, and each occupied its own place, without appearing to have any concern with the rest. In tragedy, if I may be allowed to explain my meaning by a simile, the monarchical constitution prevails, but a monarchy without despotism, as in the heroic times of the Greeks: everything yields a willing obedience to the dignity of the heroic sceptre. Comedy again is a more democratic species of poetry, and is more inclined even to the confusion of anarchy, than to any circumscription of general liberty, in the exercise of the mental powers, and even in separate thoughts, sallies, and allusions.

Whatever is dignified, noble, and grand in human nature, will only admit of a serious representation; for the person representing feels himself opposed by the subject in the exact ratio of its elevation, and is consequently tied down by it. The comic poet must therefore divest his characters of all qualities of this description; he must even deny the existence of such qualities altogether, and form an ideal of human nature in an opposite sense

to that of the tragedians, namely, in one that is odious and base. But as the tragic ideal is not a collective model of all possible virtues, neither does this inverted ideality consist in an aggregation of moral enormities and marks of degeneracy, beyond what is to be found in real life, but rather in a dependence on the animal part of our being, in the want of freedom and independence, in the want of coherence, and in the contradictions of the inward man, from which all our follies and infatuations have their origin.

The serious ideal consists of the unity and harmonious blending of the sensual man in the mental, which we see most clearly exemplified in the plastic arts, where the form, when in a complete state, is merely a symbol of mental perfection, and of the most elevated moral ideas, and where the body is wholly imbued by the soul, which is everywhere visible.* The merry or ludicrous ideal, on the other hand, consists in the perfect harmony and concord of the higher part of our nature, with the animal part as the prevailing principle. Reason and intellect are represented as voluntary slaves of the senses.

Hence we shall find that which in Aristophanes has given so much offence, flows necessarily from the very principle of comedy: the frequent allusion to the lower necessities of the body, the wanton pictures of animal desire, which, in spite of all the restraints imposed on it by morality and decency, is always breaking loose without the consciousness of the individual. If we reflect attentively, we shall find that even yet on our own stages, the infallible and inexhaustible source of the ludicrous is derived from the same ungovernable impulses of sensuality at variance with higher duties: cowardice, childish vanity, loquacity, gulosity, laziness, &c. Hence in the caducity of age, libidinous desires are more laughable than at an earlier period, as we see that they do not arise from mere animal impulse, but that reason has only served to extend the dominion of the senses beyond their proper limits. In drunkenness, too, individuals in some degree place themselves in the condition of the comic ideal.

We must not allow ourselves to entertain the erroneous idea, that the old comic writers gave the names of existing persons to their characters, and exhibited them on the stage with all the circumstances peculiar to certain individuals. For such historical characters have always with them an allegorical signification,

* I am afraid that this may be considered somewhat too mystical by many English readers. I subjoin the original, as I cannot translate the passage to my own satisfaction: *Wie wir es auf das klarste in der Plastik erkennen, wo die vollendung der Gestalt nur Sinnbild geistiger vollkommenheit und der höchsten sittlichen Ideen wird, wo der Körper ganz vom Geist durchdrungen und bis zur verklärung vergeistigt ist.*—TRANS.

and represent a class; and as their features were overcharged in the masks, their characters were overcharged in like manner in the representation. But still this constant allusion to the nearest reality, which not only allowed the poet, in the character of the chorus, to converse with the public in a general way, but also to point at certain individual spectators, is of essential importance in any view of this species of poetry.—As tragedy delights in harmonious unity, comedy flourishes in a chaotic exuberance: it seeks out the most glaring and diversified objects, and the most strongly marked oppositions. It works up therefore the most singular, unheard of, and even impossible adventures, with the local and peculiar circumstances which are nearest at hand.

The comic poet, as well as the tragic, transports his characters to an ideal element; not however to a world subjected to necessity, but one where the caprice of an inventive wit prevails without restraint, and where all the laws of reality are suspended. He is at liberty therefore to invent an action as sprightly and fantastic as possible; it may even be unconnected and contradictory, if it be calculated to place a circle of comic incidents and characters in the clearest light. In this last respect, the work should, nay must, have a leading aim, or it will otherwise be defective in solidity; and in this view also the comedies of Aristophanes may be considered as perfectly systematical. But then, that the comic inspiration may not be lost, this aim must be made a matter of diversion, and be concealed in a multitude of foreign intermixtures of all descriptions. Comedy at its commencement, namely in the hands of its Doric founder, Epicharmus, borrowed its materials chiefly from the mythical world. Even in its maturity it appears not to have renounced this choice altogether, as we may see from many of the titles of the lost pieces of Aristophanes and his contemporaries; and at a later period, in the interval between the old and new comedy, for particular reasons, it returned again to mythology, with a peculiar degree of predilection. But as the contrast between the materials and the form is here in its proper place, and nothing can be more directly opposed to the exhibition of the ludicrous, than the most important and serious concerns of men, the peculiar subject of the old comedy was naturally therefore taken from public life and the state. It is altogether political, and the private and family life, beyond which the new never soars, was only introduced occasionally and indirectly, with a reference to the public. The chorus is therefore essential to it, as being in some sort a representation of the public: it must by no means be considered as something accidental, which we may account for in the local origin of old comedy; we may assign as a more sub-

stantial reason, that it belongs to the complete parody of the tragic form. It contributes also to the expression of that festal gladness of which comedy was the most unrestrained effusion. For in all the popular and religious festivals of the Greeks, choral songs, accompanied by dancing, were exhibited. The comic chorus transforms itself occasionally into such an expression of the public joy, as for instance, when the women who celebrate the Thesmophoriæ in the piece that bears that name, in the midst of the most amusing drolleries, begin to chant their melodious hymn in honour of the gods of the festival, in the same manner as once took place on a real occasion. At these times we observe such a display of sublime lyric poetry, that the passages may be transplanted into tragedy without any change or modification. There is one deviation however from the tragic model, as it frequently happens that there are several choruses in the same comedy, who at one time all sing together, and in opposite positions, and at other times change with, and succeed each other, without any general reference. The most remarkable peculiarity however of the comic chorus, is the parabasis, an address to the spectators by the chorus, in the name and under the authority of the poet, which has no concern with the subject of the piece. Sometimes he enlarges on his own merits, and ridicules the pretensions of his rivals; at other times he avails himself of his rights as an Athenian citizen to deliver, in every assembly of the people, proposals of a serious or ludicrous nature for the public good. The parabasis may, strictly speaking, be considered as repugnant to the essence of dramatic representation: for in the drama the poet should disappear behind the characters; and these characters ought to discourse and act as if they were alone, and without any perceptible reference to the spectators. All tragical impressions are therefore by such intermixtures infallibly destroyed; but these intentional interruptions or intermezzos, though even more serious in themselves than the subject of the representation, are hailed with welcome in the comic tone, as we are then unwilling to submit to the constraint of an employment of the mind, which by continuance assumes the appearance of labour. The parabasis may partly have owed its invention to the circumstance of the comic poets not having such ample materials as the tragic, to fill up the intervals of the action when the stage was empty, by affecting and inspired poetry. But it is consistent with the essence of the old comedy, where not merely the subject, but the whole action, was sportive and jocular. The unlimited dominion of fun* is evident even in this, that the dra-

* This word is not in the best repute, for what reason the translator is not aware; but as it is expressive, and corresponds with the original, *scherz*, he has not hesitated to use it.—TRANS.

matic form itself is not seriously adhered to, and that its laws are often suspended; as in a droll disguise we sometimes venture to lay aside the mask. The practice of throwing out allusions and hints to the pit is even retained in the comedy of the present day, and is often found to be attended with great success, although unconditionally reprobated by many critics. I shall afterwards examine how far, and in what departments of comedy, these allusions are admissible.

To sum up in a few words the aim and object of tragedy and comedy, we may observe, that as tragedy elevates us by painful feelings to the most dignified view of humanity, in the words of Plato—"the imitation of the most beautiful and exemplary life;" comedy, on the other hand, from a derisory and degrading way of viewing all things, converts them into a source of the most petulant hilarity.

We have now but one comic writer of the old kind, and we cannot therefore, in forming an opinion of his merits, derive any assistance from a comparison with other masters. Aristophanes had many predecessors, Magnes, Cratinus, Crates, and others; he was indeed one of the latest comic authors, as he survived even the old comedy itself. We have no reason however to believe that we witness its decline in him, as in the case of the last tragedians; for in all probability the old comedy was still rising in merit, and he himself one of its most perfect poets. It was very different with the old comedy and with tragedy; the latter died a natural, and the former a violent death. Tragedy ceased to exist, because that species of poetry seemed to be exhausted, because it was abandoned, and because no person could again rise to the same elevation. Comedy was deprived by the hand of power of that unrestrained freedom which was necessary to its existence. Horace, in a few words, informs us of this catastrophe. "To these (Thespis and Æschylus) followed the old comedy, not without great praise; but its freedom degenerated into licentiousness, and into a violence which deservedly called for the interposition of the law. The law was enacted, and the chorus preserved an unworthy silence, after it was deprived of the power to injure."^{*} Towards the end of the Peloponnesian war, when a few individuals, contrary to the constitution, had assumed the supreme authority in Athens, a law was enacted, empowering every person attacked by comic poets, to bring them to justice; and a prohibition was issued against the introduction of real persons on the stage, or the use of such masks

* *Successit vetus his comedia, non sine multa
Laude, sed in vitium libertas excidit, et vim
Dignam lege regi: lex est accepta: chorusque
Turpiter obticuit, sublato jure nocendi.*

as bore a resemblance to their features, &c. This gave rise to what is called the middle comedy. The same form was still continued; and the representation, though not allegorical, remained always a parody. But the essence existed no more, and this species must have become insipid when no longer seasoned by the salt of personal ridicule. Its whole attraction consisted in idealizing jocularly the nearest reality, that is, in representing it under the light of the most preposterous perversity; and how was it possible to lash even the general errors of the state, without giving displeasure to individuals? I cannot therefore agree with Horace in the opinion that its abuse gave rise to this restriction. The old comedy flourished during the existence of the Athenian liberty; and both were oppressed under the same circumstances, and by the same persons. So far from the calumnies of Aristophanes having been the occasion of the death of Socrates, as many persons, without a knowledge of history, have thought proper to assert (for the *Clouds* were composed a great number of years before), it was under the same violent usurpation of power that the sportive censure of Aristophanes was reduced to silence, and the graver animadversions of Socrates were punished with death. We do not see that the persecution of Aristophanes was productive of any detriment to Euripides; the people of Athens beheld with admiration the tragedies of the one, and the parody by the other, represented on the same stage; every variety of talent was allowed to flourish undisturbed in the enjoyment of equal rights. Never was there sovereign, for such was the Athenian people, who could with better humour bear the most unwelcome truths, and even to be openly laughed at. If the abuses in the administration of the state were not by these means corrected, still it was a grand point that this unreserved exposure should be even tolerated. Besides, Aristophanes always shows himself a zealous patriot; he attacks the powerful deceivers of the people, those whom the grave Thucydides describes as so pestilential; he counselled peace in the civil war, which for ever destroyed the prosperity of Greece; he everywhere recommends the simplicity and austerity of ancient manners. So much for the political import of the old comedy.

But I hear it said, Aristophanes was an immoral buffoon. Yes, among other things, he was that also; and we are by no means disposed to justify the man, who with such great talents, could allow himself to sink so very low, whether from the impulse of rude inclinations, or from an idea of the necessity of gaining over the people, that he might tell them bold and unpleasant truths. We know at least that he boasts of having been much more sparing than his rivals in the use of obscene jests to

gain the laughter of the mob, and of having in this carried his art to perfection. That we may not be unjust towards him, we must consider what appears in him so repulsive to us, not according to modern ideas, but in the point of view of the then state of the world. In many respects the ethics of the ancients were altogether different from ours, and of a much freer character. This arose from the very nature of their religion, which was a true natural worship, and had sanctioned many public customs grossly injurious to decency. Besides, from the very retired manner in which the women lived,* while the men were almost constantly together, the language of conversation possessed a certain rudeness, as is always the case under similar circumstances. In modern Europe, since the origin of chivalry, women have given the tone of social life, and to the respectful homage which we yield to them, we owe the prevalence of a nobler morality in conversation, in the fine arts, and in poetry. Besides, the ancient comic writers, who took the world as they found it, had before their eyes a very great degree of corruption of morals.

* This brings us to the consideration of the question so much agitated by antiquaries, whether the Grecian women were present at the representation of plays, and more especially of comedies. I consider myself entitled to affirm that in tragedies they were present, as the story of the Eumenides in *Æschylus* could not have been invented with any degree of propriety, had women never visited the theatre; and as there is a passage in *Plato* (*De Leg.* lib. ii. p. 658. D.) in which he mentions the predilection of cultivated females for tragical composition.—Moreover *Julius Pollux*, among the technical expressions relative to the theatre, mentions the Greek word for spectatress. But in the case of the old comedy, I should be inclined to think that they were not present. However, its indecency alone does not appear to be a decisive proof. Even in the religious festivals the eyes of the women must have been exposed to many sights of great indecency. But in the numerous addresses in *Aristophanes* to the spectators, even where he distinguishes them according to their respective ages and otherwise, we never observe any mention of spectatresses, and the poet would hardly have omitted the opportunity which this afforded him for some witticism or joke. The only passage with which I am acquainted, whence any conclusion may be drawn in favour of the presence of women, is *Pax*, v. 963—967. But still it remains doubtful, and I recommend it to the consideration of the critic.—ΑΥΤΟΝ.

There is an express mention of women in the passage here alluded to:

ΟΙΚΕΤΗΣ.

——τῶν Στωμυων

οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲς, ὅστις οὐ κριθέν ἔχει

ΤΡΥΠΑΙΟΣ.

οὐχ αἱ γυναῖκες ἔλαβον;

but then their presence might possibly be feigned to give a handle for the coarse joke that follows,

——ἀλλ' ἐκ ἑστέρας

δύσουσι αὐταῖς ἄνδρες.

TRANS.

The most honourable testimony in favour of Aristophanes, is that of the sage Plato, who, in an epigram, says that the Graces would have selected his mind for their residence, who constantly read him, and who transmitted the *Clouds* to Dionysius the elder; with the remark, that from this play (in which, with the trade of the sophists, philosophy itself, and even his master Socrates were attacked,) he would be able to become acquainted with the state of Athens. He could hardly mean merely that the play might be considered a proof of the unbridled democratic freedom which prevailed in Athens, but must have intended to acknowledge the profound knowledge of the world possessed by the poet, and his insight into the whole machinery of the civil constitution. Plato has also characterized him in an admirable manner in his *Symposion*, where he puts into his mouth a speech on love, which Aristophanes, far from everything like high enthusiasm, considers merely in a sensual view. His description of it is however equally original and ingenious.

We might apply to the pieces of Aristophanes the motto of a pleasant and acute adventurer in Goëthe: "Mad but wise." Here we are best enabled to conceive why the dramatic art was consecrated to Bacchus: it is the drunkenness of poetry, the Bacchanalia of fun. This faculty will at times assert its rights as well as others; and hence several nations have set apart certain festivals, such as Saturnalia, Carnivals, &c. in which the people may give themselves altogether up to frolicsome follies, that when once the fit is over, they may remain quiet, and apply themselves to serious concerns during the rest of the year. The old comedy is a general masking of the world, during which many things happen that are not authorized by the ordinary rules of propriety, but during which also many things that are diverting, witty, and even instructive, come out, which without this momentary suspension of order would never be heard of.

However vulgar and even corrupted Aristophanes may have been in his personal inclinations, and however much some of his jokes may have violated the laws of morality and taste, we cannot deny to him, both in the general plan and execution of his poems, the praise of care, and the masterly hand of a finished artist. His language is extremely elegant, it displays the purest Atticism, and he accommodates it with the greatest dexterity to every tone, from the most familiar dialogue up to the high elevation of the dithyrambic ode. We cannot doubt that he would have been equally successful in grave poetry, when we see the wanton luxuriance with which he sometimes lavishes it, for the purpose of immediately destroying the impression. The elegant choice of the language which he generally uses is the more at-

tractive from the contrast occasionally displayed by him; for he not only indulges at times in the rudest expressions of the people, in foreign dialects, and even in the mutilated articulation of the Greek in the mouths of barbarians, but he extends the same arbitrary power, which he exercised over nature and human affairs, to language itself, and by composition, allusion to names of persons, or imitation of particular sounds, produces words of the most singular description. The structure of his versification is not less artificial than that of the tragedians; he uses the same forms, but differently modified: his object is ease and variety instead of gravity and dignity; but amidst all this apparent irregularity he still adheres with great accuracy to the laws of metrical composition. As Aristophanes appears to me to have displayed, in the exercise of his separate but infinitely varied art, the richest development of almost every poetical property, whenever I read his works, I am equally astonished at the extraordinary qualifications which they suppose his spectators to have possessed. We might expect, from the citizens of a popular government, an intimate acquaintance with the history and constitution of their country, with public events and transactions, with the peculiarities of all their contemporaries of any note or consequence. But Aristophanes supposes his audience to have also possessed an extensive acquaintance with the mechanism of poetry, they must have had almost every word of the tragical master-pieces by heart, to understand his parodies. And what a quick presence of mind they must have had to catch in such a rapid flight, the lightest and most complicated irony, the most unexpected sallies, and unusual allusions, which are frequently denoted by the mere inflection of a syllable! We may boldly affirm, that notwithstanding all the explanations which have come down to us, notwithstanding the accumulation of learning which has been displayed, the half of the wit of Aristophanes is altogether lost to the moderns. These comedies which, amidst all their farcical peculiarities, display the most extensive knowledge of human life, could only as a source of popular amusement be properly understood and appreciated by the incredible acuteness and vivacity of the Attic intellect. We may envy the poet who could reckon on so clever and accomplished a public; but this was in truth a very dangerous advantage. Spectators, whose understandings were so quick, would not be easily pleased. Aristophanes complains of the excessive fastidiousness of the taste of the Athenians, with whom the most admired of his predecessors were immediately out of favour, when the smallest trace of a falling off in their mental powers was perceivable. But again, he allows that the other Greeks bore not the slightest comparison

to them in a knowledge of the dramatic art. All the talents of Athens strove to excel in this department, and the competition was limited to the short period of a few festivals, during which the people always expected a succession of novelties. The distribution of the prizes (on which all depended, there being no other remaining notification of the public opinion) was determined by a single representation. We may easily imagine the state of perfection which this representation would attain under the directing care of the poet. If we also take into consideration the high state of the tributary arts, the utmost distinctness of delivery of the most finished poetry, both in speaking and singing, with the magnificence and great extent of the theatre, we shall then have some idea of a theatrical enjoyment, which has never, in an equal degree, been since known in the world.

Although among the remaining works of Aristophanes, we have several of his earliest pieces, they all bear the stamp of maturity. But he had long laboured, in silence, to perfect himself in the exercise of an art which he conceived to be of all others the most difficult; nay, from diffidence (in his own words, like a young maiden who consigns to the care of others the child of her secret love), he even gave out his earliest pieces under concealed names. He appeared for the first time without this disguise in the *Horsemen*, and here he displayed the most undaunted resolution in openly attacking the popular opinion. His object was nothing less than the overthrow of Cleon, who after the death of Pericles was at the head of all state affairs, and who was a promoter of war, and a worthless and vulgar man, but at the same time the idol of an infatuated people. The only opponents of Cleon were the rich proprietors who constituted the class of horsemen or Knights: they were interwoven by Aristophanes in the strongest manner in his party, as they formed the chorus. He had used the precaution of never naming Cleon, though he portrayed him in such a way that it was impossible to mistake him. Yet such was the dread entertained of the party of Cleon, that no mask-maker would venture to execute his likeness: the poet therefore embraced the resolution of acting the part himself, with his face merely painted over. We may easily imagine the storms and tumults which this representation must have excited among the assembled crowd; the bold and well concerted efforts of the poet were however crowned with a successful result: his piece obtained the prize. He was proud of this theatrical heroism, and often alludes with a feeling of satisfaction to the Herculean valour with which he first combated the mighty monster. It is not easily possible for a play to be more historical and political; and its rhetorical power in exciting our displeasure against Cleon is

almost irresistible: it is a true dramatic philippic. It does not however appear to me the most fortunate in point of amusement and invention. The thought of the serious danger he was incurring may possibly have disposed him to a more serious tone than was suitable to comedy, or he may have been stimulated by the persecution already suffered from Cleon to vent his rage against him in too Archilochean a manner. When the storm of cutting invective is somewhat over, we have then several droll scenes, such as that where the two demagogues, the leather-dealer (that is, Cleon), and the sausage-seller, vie with each other by all manner of predictions and dainties to gain the favour of Demos, a personification of the people, who has become childish through age, a scene humorous in the highest degree; and the piece ends with a triumphal rejoicing, which may almost be said to be affecting, when the scene changes from the Pnyx, the place where the people assembled, to the majestic Propylæon, and when Demos, whose youth has been renewed in a wonderful manner, comes forward in the garb of an ancient Athenian, and shows that with early strength he has also recovered the sentiments of the age of the battle of Marathon.

With the exception of this attack on Cleon, and with the exception also of the attacks on Euripides, whom he seems to have pursued with the most unrelenting perseverance, the other pieces of Aristophanes are not so exclusively pointed against individuals. They have always a general, and for the most part a very important aim, which the poet, with all his turnings, extravagance, and foreign intermixtures, never loses from his sight. The plays of *Peace*, *Acharnæ*, and *Lysistrata*, will be found to recommend peace; and one object of *the women in the assembly of the people*, of *the women at the festival of the Thesmophoriæ*, and of *Lysistrata*, is to throw ridicule on the relations and the morals of the female sex. In the *Clouds* he laughs at the metaphysics of the sophists, in the *Wasps* at the rage of the Athenians for hearing and determining law-suits; the subject of the *Frogs* is the decline of the tragic art, and *Plutus* is an allegory on the unjust distribution of wealth. The *Birds* are, of all his pieces, the one of which the aim is the least apparent, and it is on that very account one of the most diverting.

Peace begins in the most spirited and lively manner; the tranquilly-disposed Trygæus rides on a dunghill-beetle to heaven in the manner of Bellerophon; War, a desolating giant, with Tumult his companion, in place of all the other gods, inhabits Olympus, and pounds the cities in a great mortar, making use of the celebrated generals as pestles; Peace lies bound in a deep well, and is dragged up by a rope, through the united efforts of

all the Grecian states: all these ingenious and fanciful inventions are calculated to produce the most ludicrous effect. The play is not however afterwards sustained at an equal elevation; nothing remains but to sacrifice, and to carouse in honour of the recovered Goddess of Peace, when the importunate visits of such persons as found their advantage in war furnish an elegant entertainment, but one which by no means corresponds to the expectations to which the commencement gives rise. We have here an additional example to prove that the ancient comic writers not only changed the decoration during the intervals, when the stage was empty, but also while an actor was in sight. The scene changes from Attica to Olympus, while Trygæus is suspended in the air on his beetle, and calls anxiously to the director of the machinary to take care that he does not break his neck. His descent into the orchestra afterwards denotes his return to the earth. It is possible to overlook the freedom taken by the tragedians with the unity of place and time, on which such ridiculous stress has been laid by many of the moderns, but the bold manner in which the old comic writer subjects these external circumstances to his sportive caprice is so striking, that it must force itself on the attention of the most short-sighted individual: and yet in all the treatises on the constitution of the Greek stage, due respect has never yet been paid to it.

The *Acharnæ*, an earlier piece,* appears to me to possess a much higher degree of excellence than *Peace*, on account of the continual progress of the story, and the increasing drollery, which at last ends in a Bacchanalian revelry. Dikaiopolis, the honest citizen, enraged at the base artifices by which the people are deceived, and by which they are induced to reject all proposals for peace, sends an embassy to Lacedæmon, and concludes a treaty for himself and his family. He then retires to the country, and in spite of every obstacle, sets apart a piece of ground before his house, where there is a peaceful market for the people of the neighbouring states, while the rest of the country is suffering from the calamities of war. The blessings of peace are represented in the most tempting manner for hungry stomachs: the fat Bœotian brings his delicious eels and poultry for sale, and nothing is thought of but feasting and carousing. Lamachus, the celebrated general, who lives on the other side, is, in consequence of a sudden eruption of the enemies, called on to defend the frontiers; Dikaiopolis on the other hand is invited by his neighbours to a

* The Didascaliz give it a place in the year immediately preceding the appearance of the *Horsemen*. It is therefore the first of the remaining pieces of Aristophanes, and the only one of those which he gave out under a concealed name, that has come down to us.

feast, where every one brings his own drink. The preparations for war, and the preparations in the kitchen, are now carried on with equal industry and alacrity: here the lance is laid hold of, and there the spit; the harness lies in one corner, and the wine flagon in another; some are fixing feathers to their helmets, and others are plucking thrushes. Shortly afterwards Lamachus returns, supported by two of his companions in arms, with a broken head and a lame foot, and from the other side we see Dikaiopolis carried in drunk, by two good-natured maidens. The lamentations of the one are perpetually mimicked and ridiculed in the rejoicings of the other; and with this contrast, which is carried to the very utmost extent, the piece is brought to a conclusion.

Lysistrata is in such bad repute, that we dare only mention it in a cursory manner, as we are treading on burning ashes. According to the story of the poet, the women have taken it into their heads, by means of a rigid determination, to compel their husbands to make peace. Under the guidance of a shrewd leader they organize a conspiracy for this purpose throughout all Greece, and at the same time gain possession of the port of Acropolis in Athens. The hard situation to which the men are reduced by this separation gives rise to the most laughable scenes; plenipotentiaries appear from the two hostile powers, and peace is speedily concluded under the management of the sage Lysistrata. Notwithstanding the mad indecencies which are contained in the piece, its aim, when stript of them, is upon the whole extremely innocent: the longing for the enjoyment of domestic joys, so often interrupted by the absence of the husbands, is made the means of putting an end to the calamitous war by which Greece had so long been torn in pieces. The honest bluntness of the Lacedemonians is here portrayed in a most inimitable manner.

The *Ecclesiazusæ* is in like manner a female government, but a much more depraved one than the former. The women steal, in the dress of men, into the assemblies of the people, and by means of the majority of voices which they have obtained in this clandestine manner, they decree a new constitution, in which there is to be a community of goods and of women. This is a satire on the ideal republics of the philosophers, with such laws as Protagoras before Plato had framed. The comedy appears to me to labour under the very same fault with *Peace*: the introduction, the secret assembly of the women, the rehearsal of their parts as men, the counting of the popular assembly, are all handled in the most masterly manner; but towards the middle the action stands still. Nothing remains but the representation of the perplexities and confusion which arise from the various communities, espe-

cially the community of women, and from the prescribed equality of rights in the love of the old and the ugly, as well as of the young and the beautiful. These perplexities are pleasant enough, but they turn too much on a repetition of the joke. Generally speaking, the old allegorical comedy is exposed to the danger of sinking in its progress. When we begin with turning the world upside down, the most wonderful incidents follow one another as a matter of course, but they are apt to appear petty and insignificant, when compared with the decisive traits of a frolicsome nature which are first exhibited.

The *Thesmophoriazuszæ* has a proper intrigue, a knot which is first loosed at the conclusion, and possesses therefore a great advantage over the rest. Euripides, on account of the well known hatred of women displayed in his tragedies, was to be accused and condemned at the festival of the Thesmophoriæ, where women only were admissible. After a fruitless attempt to induce the effeminate poet Agathon to undertake the hazardous experiment, Euripides prevails on his aged father-in-law Mnesilochus, to disguise himself as a woman, that under this assumed appearance he may plead his cause. The manner in which he does this gives rise to suspicions, and he is discovered to be a man; he flies to the altar for refuge, and to secure himself still more from the impending danger, he snatches a child from the arms of one of the women, and threatens to kill it if they do not cease to persecute him. When he attempts to strangle it, it turns out to be a leather wine-flask wrapped up like a child. Euripides now appears in a number of different shapes to save his friend: at one time he is Menelaus, who finds Helen again in Egypt; at another time he is Echo, who assists the fettered Andromeda to pour out her lamentations, and immediately afterwards he appears as Perseus, who wishes to relieve her from her rock. He at length accomplishes the freedom of Mnesilochus from the sort of pillory in which he was confined, by assuming the character of a procuress, and enticing away the officer of justice who guards him, a simple barbarian, by the charms of a female flute player. These parodied scenes, composed almost entirely in the very words of the tragedies, are inimitable. We may always, generally speaking, lay our account with the most ingenious and apposite ridicule, whenever Euripides happens to be introduced; it seems as if the mind of Aristophanes had possessed a peculiar and specific power of giving a comic turn to the poetry of this tragedian.

The *Clouds* is well known, but has not however for the most part been either sufficiently understood or appreciated. The object of the piece is to show, that by a fondness for philosophical subtilities the warlike exercises come to be neglected, that specu-

lation only serves to shake the foundations of religion and morals, and that by the arts of sophistry, every right is rendered questionable, and the worst cause is frequently victorious. The Clouds themselves, as the chorus of the piece (for the poet converts these substances into persons, and dresses them out in a singular enough manner), are an allegory on the metaphysical speculations which do not rest on the ground of experience, but float about, without any definite shape or body, in the kingdom of possibilities. We may observe in general that it is one of the peculiarities of the mirth of Aristophanes to adopt a metaphor literally, and to exhibit it in this way before the eyes of the spectators. It is said of a man addicted to unintelligible reveries, that he is up in the clouds, and accordingly Socrates is actually let down in a basket at his first appearance. Whether this applies exactly to him is another question; but we have reason to believe that the philosophy of Socrates was of a very ideal cast, and that it was by no means so limited to popular application, as Xenophon would have us to believe. But why has Aristophanes given us a personification of the sophistical metaphysics in the venerable Socrates, who was himself a determined opponent of the Sophists? There was probably some personal grudge at the bottom of this, and we must not attempt to justify it; but the choice of the name by no means diminishes the merit of the picture itself. Aristophanes declares this play the most elaborate of all his works: but in his opinions we are not to take him exactly at his word. He lavishes upon himself on all occasions, and without the least hesitation, the most extravagant praises; and this was considered to constitute a part of the freedoms which comedy was allowed to take. But the *Clouds* was treated with great severity at its representation, and twice contended in vain for the prize.

The *Frogs*, as we have already said, is a piece of which the subject is the decline of the tragic art. Euripides was dead, as well as Sophocles and Agathon, and none but poets of the second rank were then remaining. Bacchus feels the want of Euripides, and resolves on bringing him back from the world below. In this he imitates Hercules, but although he is furnished with his lion-skin and club, he is very unlike him in his sentiments, and affords us, by his pusillanimity, much matter for laughter. Here we have a characteristic specimen of the audacity of Aristophanes: he does not even spare the patron of his own art, in whose honour the drama was exhibited. It was thought that the gods understood a joke as well, if not better, than men. Bacchus rows over the Acherusian lake, where the frogs greet him with their melodious croakings. The proper chorus however

consists of the shades of those initiated in the Eleusinian mysteries, and odes of astonishing beauty are put in their mouths. *Æschylus* had at first seated himself on the tragic throne in the world below, but *Euripides* was now desirous of ejecting him from it. *Pluto* presides, and appoints *Bacchus* to determine this great controversy; the two poets, the sublime and enraged *Æschylus*, and the subtle and vain *Euripides*, take opposite positions and deliver specimens of their poetical powers; they sing and speak against each other, and in all their features are characterized in the most masterly manner. At last a balance is brought on which each of them lays a verse; but notwithstanding all the efforts of *Euripides* to produce heavy verses, those of *Æschylus* always make the scale of his rival kick the beam. At last he becomes impatient of the conflict, and proposes that *Euripides* himself, with all his works, his wife, children, and *Kephisophon*, shall get into one scale, and he will only put into the other two verses. *Bacchus* has in the mean time been gained over to *Æschylus*, and although he swore to *Euripides* that he would take him back from the world below, he dismissed him with a parody of one of his own verses in *Hippolytus*:

The tongue swore, however I make choice of *Æschylus*.

Æschylus consequently returns to the living, and delivers over the tragic throne in his absence to *Sophocles*.

The observation on the changes of place, which I made when mentioning *Peace*, may be here repeated. The scene is first at *Thebes*, of which both *Bacchus* and *Hercules* were natives; the stage is afterwards changed, without its ever being left by *Bacchus*, to the nearest side of the *Acherusian lake*, which must have been represented by the opening of the orchestra, and it was not till *Bacchus* landed at the other end of the logeum that the decorations represented the world below, with the palace of *Pluto* in the back ground. This is not a mere conjecture, it is expressly stated by the old scholiast.

The *Wasp* is in my opinion the feeblest piece of *Aristophanes*. The subject is too limited, the folly represented appears a disease of too singular a description, without a sufficient universality of application, and the action is drawn out to too great a length. The poet speaks this time in very modest language of his means of entertainment, and does not even promise us an immoderate laughter.

On the other hand, the *Birds* transports us, by one of the boldest and richest inventions, into the kingdom of the fantastically wonderful, and delights us with a display of the gayest hilarity: it is a merry, rapid, and highly varied composition. I

cannot agree with the old critic in thinking that this work is chiefly characterized by its general and undisguised satire on the corruptions of the Athenian state, and of all human institutions. It seems rather to be marked by a display of the most harmless pranks, in which gods as well as mortals participate, and the poet does not seem to have had any particular aim in view. Whatever in natural history, in mythology, in the doctrine of divination, in the fables of Æsop, or even in proverbial expressions, contained anything remarkable with relation to birds, has been ingeniously drawn by the poet within his circle; he goes even back to cosmogony, and shows that at first the raven-winged night laid a wind-egg, over which the lovely Eros, with golden pinions (without doubt a bird), brooded, and thence occasioned the origin of all things. Two fugitives of the human race fall into the dominion of the birds, who resolve to revenge themselves on them for the numerous cruelties which they have suffered; the two men contrive to save themselves by convincing the bird of their preeminency over all other creatures, and they advise them to collect all their strength in one immense state; the wondrous city, Cloude cuckoo burg, is then built above the earth; all sorts of unbidden guests, priests, poets, soothsayers, geometers, scribes, sycophants, wish to nestle in the new state, but are driven out; new gods are appointed, naturally enough, after the image of the birds, as those of men bore a resemblance to themselves; the old gods are shut out from Olympus, so that no odour of sacrifices can reach them; in their emergency, they send an embassy, consisting of the carnivorous Hercules, Neptune, who, according to the common expression, swears by Neptune, and a Thracian god, who is not very familiar with Greek, but speaks a sort of mixed jargon; but yet these gods are under the necessity of submitting to the proposed conditions, and the sovereignty of the world remains to the birds. However much all this resembles a mere farcical joke, it may be said however to have this philosophical signification, that it considers all things from above in a sort of bird's-eye view, whereas the most of our ideas are only true in a human point of view.

The old critics were of opinion that *Cratinus* was powerful in living satire and direct attack, but that he was deficient in a pleasant humour, in the talent of developing his subject in an advantageous manner, and filling up his pieces with the necessary details; that *Eupolis* was agreeable in his jocularities, and skilful in the use of ingenious allusions and contrivances, so that he never even needed the assistance of the parabasis to say whatever he chose, but that he was deficient in satirical force; that *Aristophanes*, by a happy middle course, united the advantages

of both, and that in him we have satire and pleasantry combined in the most perfect and attractive manner. From these statements I conceive myself justified in assuming that among the pieces of Aristophanes, the *Horsemen* is the most in the style of *Cratinus*, and the *Birds* the nearest to the style of *Eupolis*; and that he had their respective manners in view when he composed these pieces. For although he boasts of his independent originality, and of his never borrowing anything from others, it was hardly possible that among such distinguished associates, all mutual influence should be excluded. If the opinion to which I have alluded is well founded, we have to lament the loss of the works of Cratinus, perhaps principally for the light which they threw on the manners of the times, and the knowledge which they displayed of the Athenian constitution, and the loss of the works of Eupolis, chiefly for the comic form in which they were delivered.

Plutus was one of the earlier pieces of the poet, but as we have it, it is one of his last works; for the first piece was afterwards recast by him. In its essence it belongs to the old comedy, but in the sparingness of personal satire, and in the mild tone which prevails throughout the whole, we may perceive an approximation to the middle comedy. The old comedy was first decisively suppressed by a formal enactment, but before this event Aristophanes may have deemed it prudent to avoid exercising his democratical prerogative in all its extent. It has even been said (perhaps without any foundation, as the circumstance has been denied by others) that Alcibiades ordered Eupolis to be drowned on account of a piece which he had aimed at him. Dangers of this description would repress the most ardent zeal of authorship: it is but just that those who are desirous of affording pleasure to their fellow citizens should at least be secure in their lives.

APPENDIX

TO

THE SIXTH LECTURE.

As we do not, so far as I know, possess anything like a satisfactory poetical translation of Aristophanes, and as this author, for many reasons, will ever be untranslatable, I have been induced to communicate to my readers the scene in the *Acharnæ*, in which Euripides makes his appearance; not because this piece does not contain many other scenes of equal, if not superior merit, but because it has a reference to the character of this tragedian as an artist, and because it is both free from indecency, and may be easily understood.

The Acharnians, a country people of Attica, who have suffered a great deal from the enemy are highly enraged at Dikaiopolis on account of the peace which he has concluded with the Lacedæmonians, and have determined to stone him. He undertakes to speak for the Lacedæmonians, remaining all the time behind a block, that he may lose his head if he does not succeed in convincing them. On account of this ticklish undertaking, he calls on Euripides, for the purpose of obtaining from him the tattered garments in which his heroes were in the habit of exciting commiseration. We must suppose the house of the tragic poet to occupy the middle of the back ground.*

Dikaiopolis.

It is now time to pluck up a valiant resolution,
And therefore must I pay a visit to Euripides.
Boy, boy!

* The translation of M. Schlegel is in a sort of free measure, which, as far as my limited knowledge of German parody will allow me to judge, seems to resemble that of the original. The nearest approximation to the ancient Iambic, which would be tolerated in English, is our blank verse; but I have confined myself to a translation in prose, in which the line of Greek is contained in the line of English.—TRANS.

Kephisophon (*appears.*)

Who is there?

Dikaiopolis.

Is Euripides within?

395

Kephisophon.

He is within, and yet not within, if you can understand that.

Dikaiopolis.

How within and not within?

Kephisophon.

It is all very true however, old man.

His mind is out collecting verses,*

And not within. But he himself is aloft composing

A tragedy.

Dikaiopolis.

O thrice fortunate Euripides,

400

Who possesseth a servant of such shrewd discernment.

Call him.

Kephisophon.

It is impossible.

Dikaiopolis.

But you must—

I will not go, but continue to knock at the door.

Euripides, my little Euripides!†

Hear me if ever you heard any man.

405

Dikaiopolis calls you, the Chollidian, I.

Euripides.

I have not time.

Dikaiopolis.

Come roll yourself out.‡

Euripides.

It is impossible.§

Dikaiopolis.

Come consent.

Euripides.

Well, I will roll myself out. I have not time to come down.

Dikaiopolis.

Euripides.

Euripides.

Why do you bawl so.

Dikaiopolis.

What! you are composing aloft then,

410

Instead of below. You are famous at representing the lame.

Have you the rags there you use in tragedies,

* The Greek diminutive *ισόλιον* is here correctly expressed by the German *verschen*, but I suspect *versicle* would not be tolerated in English.—TRANS.

† *Εὐριπίδης*—in the German *Euripidelein*.—TRANS.

‡ A technical expression from the *Encyclema*, which was thrust out.

§ Euripides appears in the upper story; but as in an *altana*, or sitting in an open gallery.

The dress of commiseration? You are the man for beggars!
 I kneel down in supplication to you, Euripides.
 Give me the rags of one of your old plays;
 I have a long speech to make to the chorus,
 And if I do not succeed I must expect death.

415

Euripides.

What rags do you want? Those in which old Ceneus,
 That unfortunate old man, stood the combat?

Dikaiopolis.

No, it was not Ceneus, but a person still more wretched.

420

Euripides.

Those of the blind Phœnix?

Dikaiopolis.

No, not Phœnix, no:

It was another, still more miserable than Phœnix.

Euripides.

What sort of rags does the man want?

O! you mean those of the beggar Philoctetus.

Dikaiopolis.

No, but a person still more beggarly.

425

Euripides.

You mean perhaps the sordid habiliments

In which the lame Bellerophon was attired?

Dikaiopolis.

Not Bellerophon. The man I mean

Was lame, demanded alms, garrulous, and bold of speech.

Euripides.

O! I know—Telephus the Mysian—

Dikaiopolis.

Ay, Telephus.

430

Give me this man's apparel, I beseech you.

Euripides.

Boy give him the rags of Telephus,

They lie there above the rags of Thyestes,

And under those of Inous.

Kephisophon.

Here! take them away.

Dikaiopolis (clothing himself in them).

O Jupiter, who lookest down on, and seest through everything,*

435

Assist me in equipping myself most miserably.

Euripides, as you have favoured me with these,

Give me also the concomitants of the rags:

The little Mysian cap to put upon my head;

For to-day I must look like a beggar,

440

Yet still remain who I am, though I do not appear so.†

The spectators must know who I am,

But the chorus stand round like fools,

That I may tickle them with my rhetorical flowers.

* Allusion to the holes in the mantle, while he holds it up against the light.

† These two lines, and line 446, are taken from the tragedy of Telephus.

DRAMATIC LITERATURE.

Euripides.

I will give it to you; for your contrivance is admirable.

Dikaiopolis.

Hail to thee, Telephus! as far as I can perceive,
It succeeds: already I feel myself filling with elegancies of expression.
But I still want the beggar's staff.

Euripides.

Here, take it, and depart from these stone posts.

Dikaiopolis.

O my mind, thou seest how I am driven from this habitation 451
In want of many little things. Become now
Tough and obstinate in beggary and praying. Euripides,
Give me a little basket in which a hole has been burnt by the lanthorn.

Euripides.

What occasion hast thou, O wretched man, for this basket?

Dikaiopolis.

No occasion at all, but still I wish to take it. 455

Euripides.

Begone now, leave the house, you become importunate.

Dikaiopolis.

May you be as happy as ever your mother was.* Alas!

Euripides.

Come, leave me now.

Dikaiopolis.

No, you must give me one thing yet,
A little cup broken round the brim.

Euripides.

There take it and begone. Know that you are now troublesome. 460

Dikaiopolis.

Thou knowest not, by Zeus, the evils which thou occasionest.
But O! sweetest Euripides, still one thing yet,
Give me a little pot filled with fungi.

Euripides.

O man, thou wilt carry off the whole tragedy.
Take it too, and depart.

Dikaiopolis.

I go now. 465
But what am I to do? I must still have one thing, or if I have it not,
I am ruined. Hear me, O sweetest Euripides!
When I have this I shall be gone, and not tease you longer.†
Give me the refuse cabbage leaves in the basket.‡

Euripides.

You ruin me. See there! My whole play has disappeared. 470

* poor retailer of vegetables.

† this line is omitted in the German translation.—TRANS.

‡ his and line 479 allude to the employment of the mother of Euripides.

Dikaiopolis (appearing as if he wished to go.)

Nothing more now. Now I go. I am in truth very
 Troublesome, not seeming to dread those who command.
 O wretched man that I am, I am ruined! I have forgot
 One thing, which of all others is the most important,
 My dearest little Euripides! O my darling, 475
 May I perish miserably, but I must still beg one thing from you,
 One thing alone, this alone, this one thing alone:
 Give me the chervil which you inherited from your mother.

Euripides.

The man is insulting me—shut the door on him.

(The Encyclema shuts, and Euripides and Kephisophon retire into the house.)

•• *Dikaiopolis.*

O my mind, we must proceed without the chervil, 480
 But art thou aware what a conflict awaits thee,
 Having to plead the cause of the Lacedæmonians.
 Proceed now, O my mind, behold the contest!
 Why dost thou hesitate? hast thou not devoured Euripides?
 Thou shalt be extolled. Come then, O wretched heart, 485
 Repair thither, and there have thy head
 In readiness for the block, saying what seems best to thee.
 Courage! proceed! be of good cheer, my heart.

LECTURE VII.

Whether the middle comedy was a distinct species—Origin of the new comedy—A mixed species—Its prosaic character—Whether versification is essential to comedy—Subordinate kinds—Pieces of character, and of intrigue—The comic of observation, of self-consciousness, and arbitrary comic—Morality of comedy—Plautus and Terence as imitators of the Greeks here cited and characterized for want of the originals—Moral and social aim of the Attic comedy—Statues of two comic authors.

THE ancient critics mention the existence of a *middle comedy*, between the *new* and the *old*. Its distinctive peculiarities are variously stated: at one time in the abstinence from personal satire, and the introduction of real characters, and at another time in the dismissal of the chorus. The introduction of real persons under their true names was at no time an indispensable requisite. We find characters in many pieces, even of Aristophanes, in no respect historical, but altogether fictitious, with significant names in the manner of the new comedy, and personal satire is only occasionally resorted to. The right of personal satire was no doubt essential to the old comedy, as I have already attempted to show; and by losing this right the comic writers were no longer enabled to throw ridicule on public actions and the state. When they confined themselves to private life, the chorus ceased to have any longer a signification. An accidental circumstance contributed to accelerate its removal. The dress and instruction of the chorus required a great out-lay; but when comedy came to forfeit its political privileges, and consequently also its festal dignity, and was degraded to a mere source of amusement, the poet found no longer any rich patrons to defray the expense of the chorus.

Platonius gives us still another trait of the middle comedy. On account of the danger of alluding to public affairs, the comic writers, he says, had turned all their powers of satire against serious poetry, both epic and tragic, and exposed its absurdities and contradictions; and the *Æolosikon* of Aristophanes, which was written at a late period of his life, was of such a kind. This description involves the idea of parody, which we included under the old comedy at our commencement. Platonius gives us the *Ulysses* of Cratinus, a burlesque of the *Odyssey*, as an instance. But no play of Cratinus could, in the order of time, belong to the middle comedy; for his death is mentioned by Aristophanes in his *Peace*. And as to the drama of Eupolis, in which he described what is called by us a *Utopia*, or lubberly land, what else was it but a parody of the poetical tales of the golden age? Are

not the ascent to heaven of Trygæus, and the descent to hell of Bacchus in Aristophanes, ludicrous imitations of the deeds of Bellerophon and Hercules, sung in epic and tragic poetry? Many other parodies of tragic scenes might be mentioned. In the limitation to this peculiarity, we shall in vain seek for a real and distinct line of separation. The frolicsome caprice, and allegoric signification of the composition are, poetically considered, the only essential peculiarities of the old comedy. Wherever we find them, we shall rank the work in this class, in whatever times, and under whatever circumstances, it may have been composed.

As the new comedy arose merely from the interdiction of the old, that is, the depriving it of its political freedom, we may easily conceive that an interval of vacillation, and endeavours to supply its place, would take place before a new comic form could be developed and fully established. Hence there may have been several kinds of the middle comedy, several gradations between the old and the new; and in this opinion some men of learning have concurred. This is therefore a matter of historical certainty; but in a technical point of view, a transition is not a separate kind.

We proceed therefore immediately to the new comedy, the species of poetry which with us receives the appellation of comedy. I imagine that we shall form a more correct notion of this species, if we consider it in connexion with the history of art, and from an examination of its various ingredients pronounce it mixed and conditional, than if we were to term it an original and pure species, as is done by those who either care nothing for the old comedy, or consider it as a mere rude commencement. Hence the infinite importance of Aristophanes, as we have in him what there is no other example of in the world.

The new comedy may, in certain respects, be described as the old, in a tamed state, but in productions of genius, tameness is not generally considered as praise. The new comic writers endeavoured to supply the place of the unconditional freedom of satire and gaiety, which was lost by a mixture of seriousness borrowed from tragedy, both in the form of the representation and general development, and in the impressions which they laboured to produce. We have seen that tragic poetry, in its last epoch, descended from its ideal elevation, and approached near to common reality, both in the characters and in the tone of the dialogue, but more especially in the endeavour after practical instruction respecting the manner in which civil and domestic life might best be regulated.—This attempt at utility in Euripides was ironically praised by Aristophanes.* Euripides was the precursor of the new comedy; and the poets of this species have

* *The Frogs*, v. 971—991.

always admired him in a particular manner, and acknowledged him as their master.—The similarity of tone and spirit is even so great that moral maxims of Euripides have been ascribed to Menander, and of Menander to Euripides. On the other hand, we find among the fragments of Menander, consolations which rise to the height of the true tragic tone.

Hence the new comedy is a mixture of seriousness and mirth.* The poet no longer himself turns poetry and the world into ridicule, he no longer gives himself up to a sportive and frolicsome inspiration, but endeavours to discover the ridiculous in the objects themselves; in human characters and their situations he paints what occasions mirth, in a word, what is pleasant and laughable. But it must no longer appear as the mere creation of his fancy, but seem probable, that is, real. Hence we must again modify the comic ideal of human nature which we laid down above by this law, and determine the different kinds and gradations of the comic accordingly.

The highest tragic seriousness, as I have already shown, runs always into the infinite; and the object of tragedy, properly speaking, is the struggle between the finite and outward existence, and the inward disposition which grasps at infinitude. The subdued seriousness of the new comedy, on the other hand, remains always within the circle of experience. The place of *fate* is supplied by *accident*, for such is the empirical idea of that which lies beyond our power or control. Hence we actually find among the fragments of the comic writers many expressions relative to *accident*, as in the tragedians respecting fate. To unconditional necessity, moral liberty could alone be opposed; accident was, by the understanding, to be made subservient to the advantage of the individual. On this account, the whole morality of the new comedy exactly resembles that of the fable; it is nothing more than prudence. In this sense, it was said by an ancient critic, with sufficient comprehension, and with inimitable brevity at the same time, that tragedy was the flight of life, comedy its regulation.

The idea of the old comedy is a fantastic illusion, a pleasant

* The original here is not susceptible of an exact translation into English. Though the German language has this great advantage, that there are few ideas which may not be expressed in it in words of Teutonic origin, yet words derived from Greek and Latin are also occasionally used indiscriminately with the Teutonic synonymes, for the sake of variety or otherwise. Thus the generic word *spiel* (play,) is formed into *lustspiel* (comedy,) *trauerspiel* (tragedy,) *sing-spiel* (opera,) *schauspiel* (drama;) but the Germans also use *tragödie*, *komödie*, opera and drama. In the text, the author proposes, for the sake of distinction, to give the name of *lustspiel* to the new comedy, to distinguish it from the old; but having only the single term comedy in English, I must, in translating *lustspiel*, make use of the two words, *new comedy*.—TRANS.

dream, which at last, with the exception of the general effect, all ends in nothing. The new comedy, on the other hand, is serious in its form. It rejects everything of a contradictory nature, which might have the effect of destroying the impressions of reality. It endeavours after union and connexion, and it has, in common with tragedy, a formal developement and catastrophe. It connects together too, like tragedy, events, as causes and effects; but it connects them by the laws of experience, without any reference, as in tragedy, to one idea. As the latter endeavours to satisfy our feelings towards the conclusion, in like manner the new comedy endeavours to attain, at least, an apparent point of rest for the understanding. I may remark, in passing, that this is by no means an easy problem for the comic writer: he must contrive at last to get rid of the contradictions, with the complication and intricacy of which we have been diverted, in a proper and suitable manner; when he attempts an actual equalization by making all his fools reasonable, and by improving or punishing all those who are evil disposed, there is then an end of everything like a pleasant and comical impression.

Such were the comic and tragic ingredients of the new comedy. There is yet a third however, which is in itself neither comic, nor tragic, nor even, generally speaking, of a poetic nature. I allude to the truth of the portraiture. The ideal and caricature, both in the plastic art and in dramatic poetry, lay claim to no other truth, than that of their signification; they must not seem real individual beings. Tragedy moves in an ideal, and the old comedy in a fanciful or fantastical world. As the creative power of the fancy was circumscribed in the new comedy, it became necessary to afford some equivalent to the understanding, and this consists in the probability of the subjects represented, on which the mind may exercise its powers of discrimination. I do not mean the calculation of the rarity or frequency of the subject which is represented (for without the liberty of depicting singularities, and with a rigid adherence to every-day life, comic amusement would be impossible,) but the individual truth of the picture. The new comedy must be a true image of the manners of the day, and it must have a local and national determination; and although we see comedies of other times, and other nations, brought upon the stage, yet we still endeavour to trace this resemblance in them, and are pleased when we find it. I do not mean, by the truth of the portrait, that the comic characters must be altogether individual. The most prominent features of different individuals of a class may be combined together in a certain degree of completeness, provided they are clothed with a sufficient degree of peculiarity to have an in-

dividual life, and are not represented as examples of an abstract idea. But in so far as the new comedy depicts the constitution of social and domestic life in general, it is a portrait; from this prosaical side it must be variously modified according to time and place, while the comic motives, from their poetical principle, remain ever the same.

The ancients have already acknowledged the new comedy as a faithful picture of life. Full of this idea, the grammarian Aristophanes exclaimed in a tone of expression somewhat affected, though highly ingenious: "O life and Menander! which of you two has imitated the other?" Horace informs us that it was doubted by some whether comedy could be styled a poem, because it neither in the subject, nor in the language, displayed the impressive elevation of other kinds of poetry, and the composition was merely distinguished from ordinary discourse by the versification. But it was urged by others that comedy occasionally elevated her tone, for instance, when an enraged father reproaches his son with his profligacy. This answer however is rejected by Horace as insufficient. "Would Pomponius," says he, with a biting application, "hear anything else, were his father still alive?" To answer the doubt, we must examine wherein the new comedy differs from individual reality. In the first place it is a fictitious whole, composed of congruous parts, agreeably to the scale of art. Moreover, the subject represented is handled according to the conditions of theatrical exhibition; everything foreign and incongruous is separated, and the legitimate materials are subjected to a more rapid progress, than in real life; over the whole subject, situations as well as characters, a certain clearness and distinctness of appearance is thrown, which the fleeting and indeterminate shadowings of real life are seldom found to possess. This is what constitutes the poetical in the form of the new comedy; the prosaical principle lies in the materials, in the expected resemblance to somewhat that is individual and external.

We may now proceed to the consideration of the question which has given rise to so much dispute, whether versification is essential to comedy, and whether a comedy written in prose is an imperfect production. This question has been frequently answered in the affirmative on the authority of the ancients, who, it is true, had no theatrical productions in prose; but this might have arisen from accidental circumstances, for example, the great extent of the stage, in which verse, from its more emphatic delivery, must have been better heard than prose. These critics forget that the *Mimi* of Sophron, so much admired by Plato, were written in prose. And what were these *Mimi*, if, from the

allegation that some of the idyls of Theocritus were an imitation of them in hexameters, we may venture to form any idea of them? They were pictures of real life, in which every appearance of poetry was most studiously avoided. This consists in the dramatic concatenation, which did not certainly take place in these pieces; they were mere detached scenes, in which one thing succeeded another accidentally, and without preparation, as the particular hour of any working-day or holiday brought it about. The want of dramatic interest was supplied by mimicry, that is, by the most accurate representation of individual peculiarities in action and language, which arose from nationality determined by local circumstances, and from sex, age, rank, and occupation.

Even in versified comedy, the language must, in the choice of words and phrases, differ very little, and in a manner that is hardly perceptible, from that of conversation; the freedoms of poetical expression, indispensable in other departments of poetry are here inadmissible. The versification must not differ from the common, unconstrained, and negligent tone of conversation, and seems to be that which would first suggest itself. Its cadence must not serve to elevate the characters as in tragedy, where along with the unusual sublimity of the language, it becomes as it were a mental cothurnus. In comedy the verse must merely serve to give greater lightness, spirit, and elegance to the dialogue. The question whether a comedy ought to be versified or not, must be determined by the circumstance, whether it would be more suitable to the subject to give this degree of perfection of form to the dialogue, or to imitate rhetorical and grammatical errors, even the physical imperfections of speech. This last case however has not been so frequently the cause of producing comedies in prose in modern times, as the ease and convenience of the author, and in some degree also of the player. I would however recommend to my countrymen, the Germans, the diligent use of verse, and even of rhyme in comedy; for as we are yet seeking our national comic, without knowing very well where to find it, the whole composition would gain in worth, by the compression of the form, and we should be enabled to guard, in our very outset, against many important errors. We have not yet attained such a mastery in this matter as will allow us to resign ourselves to the guidance of an agreeable negligence.

As we have pronounced the new comedy a mixed species, formed of comic and tragic, poetic and prosaic elements, it is self-evident that in the extent of this species, several subordinate species may exist, according to the preponderance of one or other of the ingredients. If the poet plays in a sportive humour with

his own inventions, he produces a farce; if he confines himself to the ludicrous in situations and characters, carefully avoiding all serious admixtures, we shall have a pure comedy (*lustspiel*); in proportion as seriousness prevails in the aim of the whole composition, and in the interest and moral discrimination which it gives rise to, the piece becomes what is called instructive or sentimental comedy; and there is only another step to the familiar or civic tragedy. Great stress has often been laid on the two last mentioned species as inventions entirely new, and of great importance, and peculiar theories have been devised for them, &c. In the lacrymose drama of Diderot, which was afterwards so much abused, the failure consisted altogether in that which was new: the affectation of nature, pedantry in the domestic relations, and the extravagant use of pathos. If we had the whole of the comic literature of the Greeks, we should, without doubt, find in it the models of all these species, with this difference, that the clear head of the Greeks never allowed them to fall into a chilling monotony, but regulated and mixed everything with wise moderation. Have not we, among the very few remaining pieces, the *Captives* of Plautus, which may be called an affecting drama; the *Step-Mother* of Terence, a true family picture; while the *Amphitryo* borders on the fantastic boldness of the old comedy, and the *Twin-Brothers* (*Menæchmi*) is a wild piece of intrigue? Do we not find, throughout all the pieces of Terence, passages of a seriously instructive, impassioned, and affecting nature? We have only to call to mind the first scene of the *Heautontimorumenos*. We are hopeful that we shall find a due place for everything, from our point of view. We see here no separated kinds, but merely gradations in the tone of the composition, which are marked by transitions, more or less perceptible.

Neither can we allow the common division into *pieces of character and intrigue*, to pass without some limitation. A good comedy ought always to be both the one and the other, or it will be deficient either in strength or animation; though sometimes the one, and sometimes the other will, no doubt, preponderate. The developement of the comic character requires contrasted situations, and these again arise from the crossing of purposes and events, which, as I have already shown, constitutes intrigue in the dramatic sense. Every one knows the meaning of intriguing in common life; the leading others, by cunning and dissimulation, to assist our hidden views without their knowledge and against their will. In the drama we meet with both significations, for the cunning of the one becomes a crossing event for the other.

When the characters are only slightly sketched, merely as much as is necessary to warrant the actions of the characters in certain cases; when the incidents are so crowded, that little room is left for the developement of character; when the plot is brought forward in such a manner, that the strange complication of misunderstandings and embarrassments, seems every moment on the point of being cleared up, and yet the knot is again drawn tighter and tighter: such a composition may well be called a piece of intrigue. The French critics have made it fashionable to consider a piece of this kind as very much inferior in value to one of character, perhaps from their looking too much to what may be retained and carried home by us from a play. It is true, the piece of intrigue, in some degree, ends at last in nothing; but why should it not be permitted to sport in an ingenious manner, without any other object? A good comedy of this description certainly requires a great display of inventive wit; besides the entertainment which we derive from the sight of so much acuteness and ingenuity, the wonderful tricks and delusions which are practised, possess a very great charm for the fancy, as has been proved by the example of many Spanish pieces.

It is objected to the piece of intrigue, that it deviates from the natural course of things, that it is improbable. We may admit the former however without also admitting the latter. The poet, no doubt, exhibits before us what is unexpected, extraordinary, and wonderful, even to incredibility; and he often sets out, even with a great improbability, as for example, the resemblance between two persons, or a disguise which is not seen through; but all the incidents must afterwards have the appearance of truth, and all the circumstances by means of which the affair takes such a wonderful turn, must be satisfactorily explained to us. As the poet, in proportion to the events which take place, gives us but a slight display of wit, we are the more strict with him respecting the *how* they are brought about.

In the comedies which are more of a characteristical nature, the characters must be grouped with art, that they may serve to throw light on each other. This however is very apt to degenerate into too systematical a method, where each character has his symmetrical contrast, and where by such means an unnatural appearance is given to the whole. Neither are those comedies deserving of the highest praise, in which all other persons seem merely introduced to allow, as it were, the principal character to go through his different probations; especially when that character consists of nothing but an opinion, or a habit (for instance, *l'optimiste, le distrait*), as if an individual could only consist

of one single peculiarity, and not be determined by all his different properties.

I have already shown in what the sportive ideal of the old comedy consisted. As the new comedy ought to bear a resemblance to a definite reality, it must not indulge in the studied and arbitrary extravagance of the former species. It must seek for other sources of comic amusement, which lie nearer the province of seriousness, and these are to be found in a more accurate and thorough delineation of character.

In the characters of the new comedy, either the *comic of observation*, or the *self-conscious* and *confessed comic*, will be found to prevail. The former constitutes the more refined, or what is called high comedy, and the latter low comedy or farce. I shall explain myself more distinctly.

There are laughable peculiarities, follies, and perversities, of which the possessor himself is unconscious, and which, when he does perceive in any degree, he studiously endeavours to conceal, as being calculated to injure him in the opinion of others. Such persons do not give themselves out for what they actually are; their secret escapes from them unwittingly, or against their will; and when the poet portrays them, he must lend his own peculiar talent for observation, that we may attain a due knowledge of them. His art consists in allowing us to discover the character of the individual, by overhearing him as it were, in his unguarded moments, and seizing on traits which have accidentally escaped him, and in placing the spectator in such a position, that however nice the observation may be, he can hardly fail to make it.

There are other moral defects, which are beheld by their possessor with a certain degree of satisfaction, and which he has even resolved not to remedy, but to cherish and preserve. Of this kind is all that, without reference to selfish pretensions, or hostile inclinations, merely originates in the preponderance of sensuality. This may, without doubt, be united to a high degree of intellect, and when such a person applies his mental powers to the consideration of his own character, laughs at himself, confesses his failings to others, or endeavours to reconcile them to them, by the droll manner in which they are mentioned, we have then an instance of the *self-conscious comic*. This kind always supposes a certain inward duality of character, and the superior half, which rallies and laughs at the other, has from its tone and its employment, a near affinity to the comic poet himself. He occasionally delivers over his functions entirely to this representative, while he allows him studiously to overcharge the picture which he draws of himself, and to enter into a sort of understanding with the

spectators, to throw ridicule on the other characters. We have in this way the *arbitrary comic*, which generally produces a very powerful effect, however much the critics may affect to underrate it. In the instance in question, the spirit of the old comedy prevails; the privileged fool or buffoon, who has appeared on almost all stages under different names, and whose character is at one time a display of shrewdness and wit, and at another of absurdity and stupidity, has inherited something of the extravagant inspiration, and the rights and privileges of the free and unrestrained old comic writer; and this is the strongest proof that the old comedy, which we have described as the original species, was not founded alone in the peculiar circumstances of the Greeks, but is essentially rooted in the nature of things.

To keep the spectators in a merry disposition, comedy must not clothe her characters with too much dignity, nor excite too deep an interest in their fate, for in both these cases an entrance will infallibly be given to seriousness. How is the poet to avoid agitating our moral feelings, when the actions represented are of a nature to give rise to disgust and contempt, or reverence and love? He must always range within the province of the understanding. He must contrast men with each other, as mere physical beings, that they may measure their powers against one another: I include of course the mental powers, and even allude to them more particularly. In this, comedy bears the nearest affinity to fable: in the fable we have animals endowed with reason, and in comedy we have men with their understanding subservient to their animal propensities. By animal propensities, I mean sensuality, and in a still more general sense, self-love. As heroism and self-devotion elevate the character to the tragic, the comic characters on the other hand, are complete egoists. This must however be understood with due limitation: we do not mean that comedy never portrays the social inclinations, but only that it represents them as originating in the natural endeavour after our own happiness. Whenever the poet goes beyond this, he leaves the comic tone. He is not to direct our feelings to the dignity or meanness, the innocence or corruption, the goodness or baseness of the characters; but to show us whether they act stupidly or wisely, suitably or unsuitably, with silliness or ability.

Examples will serve to place the thing in the clearest light. We possess an involuntary and immediate respect for truth, and this belongs to the most deep-rooted emotions of morality. A lie undertaken for a base purpose, and which threatens dangerous consequences, fills us with the highest disgust, and belongs to tragedy. Why then are cunning and deceit admitted as excellent comic motives, supposing that they are used with no bad design,

but merely for purposes of self-love, to extricate the party from a dilemma, or to attain some object, and that no dangerous consequences are to be dreaded? It is because the deceiver is already beyond the limits of the moral sphere, because truth and untruth are in themselves equally indifferent to him, being only considered in the light of means; and we are merely entertained with the display of sharpness and ready wittedness which are requisite to carry on the deceit. It is still more amusing, when the deceiver is himself caught in his own snare; for instance, when he is a liar, but has a bad memory. On the other hand, error, when not seriously dangerous, is a comic situation, more especially when this disease of the understanding proceeds from a previous abuse of the mental powers, from vanity, folly, or perversity. When deceit and error cross one another, and are by that means multiplied, excellent comic situations are produced. Two men for instance meet for the purpose of deceiving one another; both however are previously warned, and on their guard, and both go away deceived with respect to the success of their deceit. Or the one wishes to betray the other, but tells him unwittingly the truth; that other person is suspicious, and falls into the snare, merely from being so much on his guard. We might in this way lay down a sort of comic grammar, and show how the separate motives are swallowed up in one another, with a perpetually increased effect, till we come to the most artificial constructions. We should find, perhaps, in this way, that the complication of misunderstandings which constitutes a comedy of intrigue, is by no means so contemptible a part of the comic art, as the advocates of the comedies of character are pleased to assert.

Aristotle describes the laughable as an imperfection, an impropriety which is not productive of any essential injury. Excellent! for from the moment that we entertain a true sympathy with the characters, the comic tone is at an end. The comic misfortune must not exceed an embarrassment, which is at last got rid of, or at most a merited humiliation. Of this description are certain corporeal means of improvement applied to grown people, which our more refined, or at least more fastidious age will not tolerate on the stage, but of which Molière, Holberg, and other masters, have diligently availed themselves. The comic effect of this application arises from our having a pretty conspicuous demonstration of the dependence of the mind on external things; we have a practical manifestation, as it were, of the motives of action. This discipline in comedy corresponds with a violent death in tragedy, submitted to with heroic magnanimity. In the one case, the resolution remains unshaken amidst all the horrors of annihilation, the man perishes, but his principles survive; in the

other case, the bodily existence remains uninjured, but an instantaneous change of sentiments is operated.

As comedy must place the spectator in a point of view altogether different from that of moral dignity, with what right can we demand moral instruction from comedy, with what ground can we even expect such instruction? When we examine more clearly the maxims of morality of the Greek comic writers, we shall find that they are all of them founded on experience. We do not however attain a knowledge of our duties from experience; we have an immediate conviction of them from conscience; experience can only enlighten us with respect to what is advantageous or disadvantageous. The instruction of comedy does not turn on the dignity of the aim, but the sufficiency of the means. It is, as has been already said, the doctrine of prudence; the morality of result, and not of nature. Morality, in its genuine acceptation, is essentially related to tragedy.

Many philosophers have reproached comedy with immorality, and among others Rousseau, in his eloquent letter on the drama. The aspect of the actual course of things in the world is, no doubt, far from edifying; it is not however exhibited in comedy as a model for our imitation, but as a warning and admonition to us. It may be called the practical part of morality, the art of living. Whoever is unacquainted with the world is perpetually in danger of making the most erroneous application of moral principles to individual cases, and, with the very best intentions in the world, of occasioning much mischief both to himself and others. Comedy sharpens our powers of discrimination, and gives us an acquaintance with persons and situations; that is, it makes us wiser; and this is the true and only morality which it can possibly inculcate.

So far with respect to the investigation of the general idea, which must serve us as a clue to determine the merits of the different poets. I shall not be long occupied in considering the small portion of the new comedy of the Greeks, which has come down to us in fragments, or in the copies of Roman writers. The Greek literature was extremely rich in this department: the mere list of the comic writers whose works are lost, and of the names of those works, so far as they are known to us, makes of itself a dictionary of no small magnitude. Although the new comedy developed itself, and flourished only in a short interval between the end of the Peloponnesian war, and the first successors of Alexander the Great, yet the stock of pieces amounted to some thousands; but time has made such havoc in this superfluity of works of ingenuity and wit, that nothing remains but a number of detached fragments in the original language, which are frequently disfigured in such a manner as not to be intelligible, and

about twenty translations or copies of Greek originals in Plautus, and six in Terence. The labours of criticism might be here, with propriety, employed in endeavouring to deduce, from a careful consideration of the whole of the traces which we possess, something like a just estimate and characterization of what we have lost. The chief point in a labour of this kind, I can take upon me to mention. The fragments and maxims of the comic writers are in their versification and language distinguished for the utmost purity, elegance, and accuracy; the tone of society in them is characterized by a certain Attic grace. The Latin comic poets again are negligent in their versification, and the idea of it is almost lost in the many metrical freedoms taken by them. Even in language, they are deficient in cultivation and polish, at least Plautus is. Several learned Romans, and Varro among others, have, it is true, praised the style of this poet, but we must learn to distinguish between philological and poetical approbation. Plautus and Terence were among the most ancient Roman writers, and belonged to a time when the language of books was hardly yet in existence, and when everything was drawn fresh from life. This *naïve* simplicity had its charms in the eyes of those Romans, who belonged to the period of learned cultivation: but it was much more a natural gift than the fruit of poetical art. Horace condemns this excessive partiality, and asserts that Plautus and the other comic poets were negligent in the composition of their pieces, and wrote them in the utmost haste, that they might be the sooner paid. We may safely affirm therefore that in the graces and elegancies of execution, the Greek poets have always lost in the Latin imitations. We must re-translate these in idea, into the finished elegance which we perceive in the fragments. Besides, Plautus and Terence made many changes in the general plan, which would hardly be improvements. The former omitted, at times, scenes and characters, and the latter made additions, and melted down two plays into one. Was this done with the view of improvement in their art, and were they actually desirous of excelling their Grecian predecessors in the structure of their pieces? I am doubtful of this. In Plautus everything ran out into breadth, and he was obliged to remedy in some other way the lengthening which this gave to the original; the imitations of Terence, on the other hand, from his want of facility and invention, turned out somewhat bad, and the gaps were filled up by him with materials derived from different pieces. He was even reproached by his contemporaries with having falsified and destroyed a number of Grecian pieces, for the purpose of making a few Latin ones out of them.

Plautus and Terence are generally mentioned as writers, in

every respect, original. The Romans were to be forgiven for this: they possessed but little of a peculiar poetical spirit, and this poetical literature owed its origin, for the most part, first to translation, then to a freer imitation, and finally to an appropriation and new modelling of the Greek. They allowed therefore a particular sort of translation to pass for originality. We find in the apologetic prologues of Terence, as an excuse for his plagiarism, that he was accused of it, because he had again made use of a subject already translated from the Greek. As we cannot however now consider these writers in the light of creative artists, and as they are only important to us in so far as we are enabled through their means to become acquainted with the shape of the new Grecian comedy, I shall take this opportunity of saying a few words with respect to their character, and then return to the consideration of the new Greek comic writers.

Among the Greeks, the poets and artists lived at all times in the most honourable relations; among the Romans however, polite literature was at first cultivated by men of the lowest rank, by needy foreigners, and even by slaves. Plautus and Terence, who lived nearly about the same period, towards the end of the second Punic war, and in the interval between the second and third, were of the lowest rank: the former, a miserable day-labourer, and the latter, a Carthaginian slave, and afterwards a freed man. Their fortunes, however, were very different. Plautus was obliged to hire himself out in the intervals, when he was not employed in writing comedies, as a beast of burden in a hand-mill; Terence became the inmate of the elder Scipio and his bosom friend Lælius, and they deigned to admit him to such a degree of familiarity, that he was charged with being assisted by these noble Romans in the composition of his pieces, and it was even said that they allowed their own labours to pass under his name. The habits of their lives are perceivable in their respective modes of writing: the bold roughness of Plautus, and his famed jests, betray his intercourse with the lower classes; in Terence, again, we can discern the trace of good society. They are to be distinguished also from the choice of the pieces on which they employed themselves. Plautus generally inclines to the farcical and the exaggerated, and often to disgusting drollery; Terence prefers the delicately characteristic, and the moderate, and he approaches the seriously instructive and sentimental kind. Some of the pieces of Plautus are taken from *Diphilus* and *Philemon*, but we have reason to believe that he added a considerable degree of coarseness to his originals; from whom he derived the others we know not, except we are to consider ourselves warranted by the assertion of Horace, "it is said that Plautus took for his model the

Sicilian Epicharmus," in conjecturing that he borrowed the *Amphitryo*, a piece which is of quite a different kind from the others, and which he himself calls a tragi-comedy, from the old Doric comic writer, who employed himself chiefly on mythological subjects. Among the pieces of Terence, whose copies, with the exception of changes in the composition, are probably much more faithful in detail than those of the other, we find two from Appollodorus, and the rest from Menander. Julius Cæsar has honoured Terence with some verses, in which he calls him a Menander, praising the smoothness of his style, and only lamenting that he has lost a certain comic strength, which belonged to his original.

This naturally brings us back to the Grecian masters. Diphilus, Philemon, Appollodorus, and Menander, are certainly four of the most celebrated names among them. The palm, for elegance, delicacy, and sweetness, is with one voice given to Menander, although Philemon frequently carried off the prize from him, probably because he wrote more in the taste of the multitude, or because he availed himself of adventitious means of success. This was at least insinuated by Menander, who when he met his rival one day said to him: "Pray Philemon, dost thou not blush when thou obtainest the victory over me?"

Menander flourished after Alexander the Great, and he was the contemporary of Demetrius Phalereus. He was instructed in philosophy by Theophrastus, but his inclinations led him to that of Epicurus, and he boasted in an epigram, "that if Themistocles freed his country from slavery, Epicurus freed it from irrationality." He was fond of the choicest sensual enjoyments: Phædrus describes him to us in an unfinished tale, as betraying, even in his exterior, all the marks of a vicious effeminacy; and his love intrigue with the coquette Glycera is well known. The Epicurean philosophy, which placed the highest felicity of life in the benevolent affections, but which neither spurred men on to heroic action, nor allowed them to feel the want of it, could hardly fail to be well received among the Greeks, after the loss of their old and glorious freedom: it was admirably calculated to operate as a consolation to them, with their cheerful and mild way of thinking. It is perhaps the most suitable for the comic poet, as the stoical philosophy is for the tragedian. The object of the former is merely to produce mitigated impressions, and by no means to excite a strong degree of discontent with human infirmities. We may easily conceive too why the Greeks conceived a passion for the new comedy at the very period when they lost their freedom, as it drew them from a participation in human affairs in general, and political events, and absorbed their attention wholly in domestic and personal concerns.

The Grecian theatre was **originally** formed for the higher walks of the drama; and we will **not** attempt to dissemble its inconveniences and disadvantages for comedy. The frame was too wide, and it was impossible for the picture to fill it. The Greek stage was open to the heavens, and it exhibited little or nothing of the interior of the houses.* Comedy was therefore under the necessity of placing the scene in the street. This gives rise to many inconveniences; people frequently came out of their houses to confide their secrets to one another in the streets. By such means, it is true, the poets were spared the necessity of changing the scene, as it was taken for granted that the families concerned in the action lived in the same neighbourhood. It may be urged in justification, that the Greeks, like all other southern nations, lived much out of their private houses, in the open air. The chief disadvantage with which this construction of the stage was attended, was the circumscription of the female parts. If the costume was to be observed, which the essence of the comedy required, the retired manner of living of the female sex in Greece rendered the exclusion of unmarried women, and young women in general, altogether unavoidable. No other females could appear but aged mothers, servant-maids, or courtesans. Besides depriving the audience of many agreeable situations, this other inconvenience is produced, that the whole piece frequently turns on a marriage, or a passion for a young woman, who is never once seen from the beginning to the end of it.

Athens, where the fictitious, as well as the actual scenes were generally placed, was the centre of a small territory, and in no wise to be compared with our great cities, either in extent or population. The republican equality admitted no marked distinction of ranks; there were no proper nobility, all were alike citizens, richer or poorer, and for the most part, had no other occupation than that of managing their properties. Hence the Attic comedy could not well admit of the contrasts arising from diversity of tone and cultivation; it generally continues in a sort of middle state, and has something citizen-like, nay, if I may so

* The encyclema must, in some degree, have served for this purpose, as we can have no doubt that, in the commencement of the *Clouds*, Strepsiades and his son were seen sleeping on their beds. Moreover, Julius Pollux mentions among the particulars of the decoration of a comedy, a sort of tent, hut, or shed, with a gate, originally a stable adjoining to the middle edifice, but afterwards applicable to many purposes. In the *Semproresses of Aristophanes*, it represents a sort of workshop. Here, or in the encyclema, entertainments were given, which in the old comedies sometimes took place before the eyes of the spectators. With the southern habits of the ancients, it was not, perhaps, so unnatural to feast with open doors, as it would be in the north of Europe. But no modern commentator has yet, so far as I know, endeavoured to illustrate in a proper manner the theatrical regulation of the pieces of Plautus and Terence.

say, something of the manners of a small town about it, which we do not see in those comedies, in which the manners of a court, and the refinement or corruption of monarchical capitals are portrayed.

With respect to the intercourse between the two sexes, the Greeks were neither acquainted with the gallantry of modern Europe, nor the union of love and enthusiastic respect and adoration. All ended in sensual passion or marriage. The latter was, by the constitution and manners of the Greeks, much more a matter of duty, or an affair of convenience, than of inclination. The laws were only strict in one point, the preservation of the native origin of the children, which was alone legitimate. The civic right was a great prerogative, the more valuable the smaller the number of citizens, and this number was therefore not allowed to increase beyond a certain point. Hence marriages with foreign women were not valid. The society of a wife, who frequently had not even been once seen before marriage, and who had passed her whole life within the walls of a house, could not be productive of much entertainment; this was sought after among women who were entitled to less ceremony, and who were generally foreigners without property, or persons who had obtained their emancipation, &c. The indulgent morality of the Greeks admitted of almost every degree of freedom with women of this description, especially in the case of young and unmarried men. The old comic authors exhibited this way of living in a more undisguised way than we think consistent with decency. Their comedies frequently end, like all comedies in the world, with marriages (it seems this catastrophe brings a seriousness along with it;) but with them marriage is frequently only a means of reconciliation with a father for the irregularities of an interdicted amour. It sometimes happens, however, that the amour is changed into a lawful marriage by means of a discovery that the female, supposed to be a foreigner or slave, was by birth an Athenian citizen. It deserves to be remarked that, to the fruitful mind of the poet who carried the old comedy to perfection, the first germ of the new comedy is to be attributed. *Kocalus*, the last piece which Aristophanes composed, contained a seduction, a recognition, and all the leading circumstances which were afterwards imitated by Menander.

From what we have premised, we may at once see nearly the whole circle of characters; nay, those which perpetually recur are so few, that they may be almost all of them here enumerated. The austere and frugal, or the mild and yielding father, the latter not unfrequently under the dominion of his wife, and making common cause with his son; the housewife, either loving and

sensible, or obstinate and domineering, and proud of the accession brought to her by the family property; the giddy and extravagant, but open and amiable young man, who even in a passion sensual at its very commencement is capable of true attachment; the vivacious girl, who is either thoroughly depraved, vain, cunning, and selfish, or still well disposed, and susceptible of higher emotions; the simple and boorish, or the cunning slave, who assists his young master to deceive his old father, and obtain money for the gratification of his passions by all manner of tricks; (*as this person plays a principal part, we shall shortly state some further observations respecting him;*) the flatterer or accommodating parasite, who, for the sake of a good meal, is ready to say or do anything that may be required of him; the sycophant, a man whose business it was to set quietly disposed people by the ears, and stir up law-suits, for which he offered his services; the braggart soldier, who returns from foreign service, generally cowardly and simple, but who assumes airs from the fame of the deeds performed by him abroad; and lastly, a servant or pretended mother, who preaches up a bad system of morals to the young girl entrusted to her guidance; and the slave-dealer, who speculates on the extravagant passions of young people, and knows no other object than the furtherance of his own selfish views. The two last characters, from their rough and contumacious perversity, are, to our feelings, a true blemish in the new Grecian comedy; but it was impossible, from the manner in which it was constituted, to dispense with them.

The cunning servant is generally also the buffoon, who confesses his own sensuality, and his want of principle, with a degree of self-satisfaction and exaggeration, and who jokes at the expense of the other characters, and even occasionally addresses the pit. This is the origin of the comic servants of the moderns, but I am inclined to doubt whether, with our manners, we are warranted by propriety and truth, in introducing such a character. The Greek servant was a slave, exposed for life to the arbitrary caprice of his master, and frequently subjected to the most severe treatment. We willingly pardon the man, deprived by the laws of all his original rights, who makes trick and artifice his trade: he is in a state of war with his oppressors, and cunning is his natural weapon. But in our times, a servant, free in the choice of his station and his master, who assists the son in carrying on a scheme to deceive the father, is a good for nothing scoundrel. With respect to the open confession of sensuality, which in other productions is used for giving the comic stamp to servants and persons in low situations, it may be allowed to be continued without impropriety: of those who have few privi-

leges in life, we are not disposed to exact much; and they may boldly own the vulgarity of their inclinations, without giving any shock to our moral feelings. The better the condition of servants in real life, the less are they adapted for the stage; and it is to the praise of our more humane age, that in our family pictures, we see servants of the most respectable characters, who are better adapted for exciting tears than laughter.

The repetition of the same characters was acknowledged by the Greek comic writers, in their frequent use of the same name, and a name which was in part expressive of the character. In this they did better than many comic poets of modern times, who, for the sake of novelty of character, torture themselves in an endeavour to attain complete individuality, by which they seldom produce any other effect than that of drawing our attention from the main business of the piece, and wasting it on accessary circumstances. They fall imperceptibly back again into the old and well known character. It is better to delineate the characters with a certain breadth, and to leave room to the actor to determine them more accurately, and to enter more fully into their spirit, according to the nature of each composition. In this respect the use of masks admits of justification. Masks and the other peculiarities of the ancient theatre, such as the acting in the open air, were originally calculated for other departments of the drama, and may seem a greater incongruity in the new comedy than in the old, and in tragedy. It was certainly however unsuitable to the spirit of the new, that, while in other respects it approached nearer to real nature, the masks deviated more from it than in the old, were more overcharged in the features, and bore a greater resemblance to caricature. However astonishing this may appear to us, it has been attested in too express and formal a manner* to allow us to entertain any doubt of it. As they were prohibited from bringing portraits of real persons on the stage after the loss of their freedom, they were always afraid lest they might accidentally stumble upon some resemblance, and especially to any of their Macedonian rulers, and this was the mode in which they endeavoured to secure themselves. Yet the exaggeration in question would hardly be without its meaning. We find it accordingly stated, that an unequal profile, with one eyebrow drawn up and the other down, was expressive of useless and intermeddling activity,† and we may in fact remark that

* See Platonius, in *Aristoph. cur.* Kuster. p. xi.

† See *Jul. Pollux*, in the section of comic masks. Compare Platonius in the place cited, and Quinctilian, l. xi. c. 3. The supposed wonderful discovery of Voltaire respecting tragic masks, which I mentioned in the third lecture, will hardly be forgotten.

men, who are in the habit of looking at things with anxious accuracy, are apt to acquire such distortions.

Among other peculiarities the masks in comedy have this advantage, that on the inevitable reappearance of characters the spectator knows at once what he has to expect. I was once present at a representation at Weimar, of the *Brothers* of Terence entirely in the ancient costume which, under the direction of Goëthe, furnished us a truly Attic evening. Partial masks, fixed in a suitable manner to the real countenance, were made use of;* and notwithstanding the smallness of the theatre, I did not find that they were in any way destructive of comic effect. The mask was peculiarly favourable for the jokes of the cunning slave: his uncouth physiognomy, as well as his apparel, stamped him for an individual of a peculiar race, as the Grecian slaves, in some sort, were even from extraction, and they might therefore be allowed to speak and act in a different manner from the rest of the people.

From the limited circle of their civil and domestic life, and the simple theme of the characters above-mentioned, the invention of the Greek comic writers contrived to produce an inexhaustible diversity of variations, and yet they always, even in that on which they grounded their developement and catastrophe, remained true to their national costume, and on that account are deserving of very high praise.

The circumstances of which they availed themselves for this purpose were generally the following. Greece consisted of a number of small separate states, which lay round one another on sea-coasts and islands. Navigation was frequent, piracy far from unusual, and human beings were procured in this way for the supply of the slave trade. Freeborn children were either carried off from their parents, or exposed by them, in virtue of the right allowed to them, by the law, and unexpectedly saved from destruction, and afterwards recovered by these parents. All this prepares us for the recognitions of parents and children, brothers and sisters, &c. which appear in the new Greek comedies, and which were borrowed by the comic writers from the tragedians. The subject of the plot is present, but the singular and improbable accident on which it is founded, is removed to a distance of time and place, so that the comedy, though taken from everyday life, has still, in some degree, a wonderful and romantic back ground.

* This was not unknown to the ancients, as is proved by many comic masks with a circular opening of considerable width, through which the mouth and adjoining features were allowed to appear; and which, with their living motion, must have produced a highly ludicrous effect, from the contrast in the fixed distortion of the rest of the countenance.

The Greek comic writers were acquainted with comedy in all its latitude, and employed themselves diligently on all the subordinate departments, the farce, the piece of intrigue, and the various gradations of pieces of character, from caricature to the most refined, and even the serious or sentimental drama. They possessed besides a most enchanting species, of which no examples are now remaining. We see from the titles of the pieces, and other circumstances, that they sometimes introduced historical persons, as the poetess of Sappho, for instance, representing the love of Alcæus and Anacreon for her, and her passion for Phaon; the story of her leap from the Leucadian rock owes its origin perhaps to the comic writers alone. To judge from the objects of them, these comedies must have approached to our romantic drama; and the mixture of beautiful passion with the tranquil grace of the ordinary comedy must undoubtedly have been very attractive.

I conceive that in the above observations I have given a faithful picture of the Greek comedy; I have not attempted to disguise either its defects or its narrow limits. The antique tragedy and old comedy, are inimitable, and stand alone in the whole range of the history of art. But in the new comedy we may attempt to measure our strength with the Greeks, and even endeavour to surpass them. Whenever we descend from the Olympus of true poetry to the earth, that is, whenever we mix the prose of a definite reality with the ideal creations of fancy, the success of productions are no longer determined by mind, and a feeling for art, but by circumstances of a more or less favourable nature. The figures of the gods of the Grecian sculptors are perfect models for all ages. The noble employment of giving an ideal perfection to the human form having once been embraced by the fancy, with an equal degree of inspiration we could only have a repetition of the same attempts. The modern statuary is however the rival of the ancient in personal and individual resemblances: but this is not a pure creation of art; observation must here come in for its share: and whatever degree of science, profundity, and taste may be displayed in the execution, the artist is still tied down to the subject actually before him.

In the admirable portrait-statues of two of the most celebrated comic writers of antiquity, *Menander* and *Posidippus* (formerly in the Vatican, and now in the Museum in Paris), it appears to me that the physiognomy of the new Greek comedy is almost visibly and personally expressed. They are sitting in arm chairs, with a roll in their hands, and in the most simple dress; with all the ease and security of a conscious superiority in their art; and in that maturity of age which is suitable for the impartial obser-

vation which is requisite for comedy, but yet hale and active, and free from all symptoms of caducity; we see in them that corporeal vigour, which is at once a proof of soundness of constitution of body and mind; no inspired enthusiasm, but at the same time nothing of folly or extravagance; a sage seriousness rather dwells on the brow, which is not however wrinkled with care, but with the exercise of reflection; yet in the alert look, and the willing smile on the mouth, we cannot mistake the indications of a playful irony.

LECTURE VIII.

Roman theatre.—Native kinds: Attellanic Fables, Mimi, Comedia Togata.—Greek tragedy transplanted to Rome.—Tragic authors of a former epoch, and of the Augustan age.—Idea of a national Roman tragedy.—Causes of the want of success of the Romans in Tragedy.—Seneca.—The Italians.—Pastoral dramas of Tasso and Guarani.—Small progress in tragedy.—Metastasio and Alfieri.—Character of both.—Comedies of Ariosto, Aretin, Porta.—Improvisatore masks.—Goldoni.—Gozzi.—Latest state.

IN the preceding part of these Lectures, we have been occupied with an investigation into the nature of the drama in general, and its peculiar appearance among the Greeks, whose stage was not only original, but carried to the utmost degree of perfection. In entering upon a consideration of the dramatic literature of other nations, we must in general express ourselves with greater brevity; and in doing so, we are not afraid that we shall be accused of either disproportionate length or conciseness.

And first, with respect to the Romans, whose theatre immediately follows that of the Greeks, we have only, as it were, to notice one great gap, which is partly owing to their want of creative powers in this department, and partly to the loss of all their theatrical productions, with the exception of a few fragments. The only works of the good classical times, which have descended to us, are those of *Plautus* and *Terence*, whom I have already characterized as *copyists* of the Greeks.

The Romans could not be said to have had a poetry of their own native growth, as it was first artificially cultivated among them along with other luxuries, when the original character of Rome was nearly extinguished by an imitation of foreign manners. We have in the Latin, the example of a language modelled into poetical expression, according to foreign grammatical and metrical forms. This imitation of the Greek bore at first the marks of great violence and constraint: the Græcism was carried the length of a clumsy intermixture of the two languages. The poetical style was gradually softened down, and we still perceive in Catullus the last traces of its early harshness, which are not however without a certain stately attraction. Those constructions, and those compound words more especially, which were too much at variance with the internal structure of the Latin, and which were grating to the Roman ear, were in time thrown out, and the poets at length succeeded in the age of Augustus, in producing the most agreeable combination of the peculiarities of the

two languages. Hardly however had this equilibrium been attained, when all free developement was at a stand, and the poetical expression, notwithstanding an apparent advance to greater boldness and learning, was irrevocably confined within the circle of those modes of expression which had once received the sanction of public approbation. The Latin poetical language therefore flourished only during the short interval which elapsed between the period of its formation and its death; and with respect to the spirit of the poetry, its fate cannot be said to have been more successful.

The Romans were not led to the invention of theatrical amusements, from the want of representations to fill up the leisure of their festivals, and to enliven the mind by withdrawing it from the concerns of life; but in the despondency of a desolating pestilence, against which all remedies seemed insufficient, they had recourse to the theatre, as a means of appeasing the anger of the gods, having previously been only acquainted with gymnastic exercises, and circus races. The *histriones*, whom they sent for from Etruria, were however merely dancers, who probably did not attempt pantomimic movements, but endeavoured to delight their audience by a display of bodily activity. The oldest spoken plays, the *Fabulæ Atellanæ*, were borrowed by the Romans from the *Osci*, the indigenous inhabitants of Italy. They were satisfied with these *saturæ* (for so they were called, as at first they were merely improvisatory farces, without any dramatic connexion; *satura*, signifying a farrago, or mixture of everything), till Livius Andronicus, somewhat more than five hundred years after the foundation of Rome, began the imitation of the Greeks; and the regular compositions of tragedy and the new comedy (the old it was impossible to transplant) were then, for the first time, known in Rome.

Thus the Romans owed the first idea of a play to the Etrurians, the effusions of a sportive humour to the Oscians, and the higher class of dramatic productions to the Greeks. They displayed however more originality in the comic than in the tragic department. The Oscians, whose language soon ceased to be spoken, and of which the remains were only to be found in these farces, were a race so nearly related to the Romans, that their dialect must have been immediately understood by a Roman audience: for if this had not been the case, how could the Romans have derived any amusement from the *Atellanæ*? So much did they appropriate this species of drama to themselves, that Roman youths, of noble families, became enamoured of the amusement, and used to engage in the representation; on which account, even the players, who gained a livelihood by acting

the Atellanic fables, enjoyed peculiar privileges, being exempted from the ignominy which attached to other theatrical artists, the exclusion from corporations and from military service.

The Romans had, besides, their peculiar *Mimi*. The foreign name of these small pieces would lead us to conclude that they bore a great affinity to the Greek *Mimi*; they differed however considerably in form; we know also that the manners portrayed in them had a local truth, and that the subject was not derived from Grecian compositions.

It is peculiar to Italy, that from the earliest times the people have displayed a native talent for a merry, amusing, though very rude species of farce or buffoonery, in extemporary speeches and songs, with accompanying gestures; but this talent has seldom been coupled with true dramatic knowledge. In justification of this last assertion, we have only to notice what has been performed in the higher walks of the drama in that country, down to the very latest period. The former might be confirmed by a number of circumstances, which would lead us however too far from our object into the history of the Saturnalia and similar customs. In the wit, and the apposite ridicule on passing events, adapted to the capacity of the people, which prevail in the dialogues of Pasquino and Marforio, we even find many traces of the times of the Emperors, who were not however very much disposed to favour these liberties.

The conjecture that in these *Mimi* and *Atellanæ* we must perhaps seek for the first germ of the *commedia dell' arte*, the improvisatory farce with standing masks, is more immediately connected with our present purpose. There is a striking affinity between this and the *Atellanæ*, in the employment of different dialects to produce a ludicrous effect. But how would Harlequin and Pulcinello be astonished, were they to be told that they descended in a direct line from the buffoons of the ancient Romans, and even from the Oscians!—With what drollery would they be disposed to requite the labours of the antiquarian, who should trace back their glorious pedigree to this root! We know from the figures on the Greek vases, that a dress very much resembling theirs was used even in the grotesque masks of the old comedy: long breeches, and a waistcoat with arms, articles of dress which the Greeks, as well as the Romans, never used except on the stage. Even in the present day *Zanni* is one of the names of Harlequin; and *Sannio* in the Latin farces was a buffoon, who, according to the accounts of ancient writers had a shaven head, and a dress patched together of all colours. The figure of Pulcinello is said to be an accurate resemblance of what has been found painted on the walls in Pompeii. If he came originally

from Atella, he may still be accounted a native of his ancient country. The objection that these traditions could not have been preserved during the cessation of all theatrical amusements, for so many centuries, will be easily got over, when we recollect the freedom enjoyed during the annual carnival, and the frolicsome festivals of the middle ages.

The Greek Mimi were dialogues in prose, and not destined for the stage; the Roman were in *verse*, were represented, and often delivered extempore. The most celebrated authors in this way were Laberius and Syrus, contemporaries of Julius Cæsar. The latter, when dictator, by a courtly request, compelled Laberius, a Roman knight, to appear publicly in his Mimi, although the scenic employment was stigmatized with the loss of civil rights. Laberius complained of this in a prologue, which we still have, and in which the suffering of wounded honour is expressed in a noble and affecting manner. We cannot well conceive how, in this disposition of mind, he could be capable of a display of extravagant buffoonery, nor how, with such a painful example of voluntary degradation before their eyes, the spectators could take any delight in it. Cæsar kept his word: he gave Laberius a considerable sum of money, and invested him anew with the knightly ring, which however could not reinstate him in the opinion of his fellow citizens. He took his revenge at the same time for the prologue and other allusions,* by bestowing the prize on Syrus, the slave, and afterward the freedman and scholar of Laberius in the mimetic art. We have still a number of sentences from the Mimi of Syrus, which from their internal worth and elegant conciseness of expression, are deserving of a place by the side of those of Menander. Some of them go even beyond the moral horizon of serious comedy, and exhibit something like a stoical elevation. How was the transition possible from low farce to this elevation? And how could similar maxims be possibly introduced, without such an important concatenation of human relations, as that which is exhibited in the most dignified comedy? At all events, they are calculated to give us a very favourable idea of the *Mimi*. Horace indeed speaks slighting of the literary merit of the Mimi of Laberius, either from the arbitrary nature of their composition, or from the negligent manner in which they were executed. However, we ought not to allow

* What an inward humiliation Cæsar would have felt, could he have supposed that in a few generations, Nero, his successor in absolute sovereignty, from a mere lust for self-degradation, frequently exhibited himself in a manner which, even in a Roman of the middle rank of life, he then knew would excite a general feeling of discontent.

our opinion on this subject to be too much influenced by this critical poet; for, from motives which we can easily comprehend, he lays much greater stress on the careful use of the file than on original boldness, and fulness of invention. One entire *Mimus*, which unfortunately time has not spared for us, would have thrown more light on the question, than all the confused accounts of the grammarians, and all the conjectures of modern scholars.

The regular comedy of the Romans was for the most part *palliata*, that is, it appeared in a Grecian dress, and represented Grecian manners. This is the case with the whole of the comedies of Plautus and Terence. But they had also a *comœdia togata*, so called from the Roman dress which was worn in it. *Afranius* is celebrated as the principal writer in this walk. We have no remains whatever of him, and the accounts of the nature of his works are so very scanty, that we cannot even determine with certainty, whether the *togatæ* were original comedies of an entirely new invention, or merely Greek comedies adapted to Roman manners. The last case is the more probable, as *Afranius* lived in a period when the Roman genius had not yet attempted to soar on the wings of original invention; and yet we cannot well conceive the possibility of adapting Attic comedies, without the greatest violence and constraint, to local circumstances of so very different a nature. The way of living of the Romans was in general serious and grave, although in private society they displayed a great turn for wit and joviality. The diversity of ranks among the Romans was politically marked in a very decided manner, and the wealth of private individuals was frequently not inferior to that of sovereigns: women lived much more in society, and acted a much more important part with them than among the Greeks; and from this independence they fully participated in the overwhelming tide of corruption and external refinement by which it is accompanied. With these essential differences, an original Roman comedy would have been a remarkable phenomenon, and would have enabled us to see these conquerors of the world in an aspect altogether new. That this however was not accomplished in the *comœdia togata*, the indifferent manner in which it is mentioned by the ancients will hardly leave us any reason to doubt. Quintilian has not attempted to conceal from us that the Latin literature was lamest in comedy; these are the very words in which he expresses himself.

With respect to tragedy, we must in the first place remark, that the Grecian theatre was not introduced into Rome without considerable changes in its arrangement, that the chorus had no longer a place in the orchestra, in which the most distin-

guished spectators, the knights and senators, now sat, but remained on the stage itself. Hence, the same objections which we urged against the attempts to introduce the chorus in modern times, are equally applicable to the Roman theatre.—Other deviations from the Grecian plan were sanctioned, which could hardly be considered as improvements. Even at the introduction of the regular drama, Livius Andronicus, a Grecian by birth, and the first tragic poet and actor of Rome, in the monodies (lyrical pieces which were sung by one person, and not by the chorus), separated the singing from the mimetic dancing, so that the latter only remained to the actor; and instead of the former, a boy stood beside the flute-player, and accompanied him with his voice. Among the Greeks in better times, the tragic singing, and the accompanying rhythmical gestures, were so simple, that one person was sufficient to do at the same time the most ample justice to both. The Romans however, it would seem, preferred separate skill to harmonious unity. Hence arose their fondness, at an after period, for pantomimes, of which the art was, in the time of Augustus, carried to the greatest perfection. From the names of the most celebrated of the performers, Pylades, Bathyllus, &c., it would appear that those who practised this mute eloquence in Rome were Greeks; the lyrical pieces which their dancing expressed were also delivered in the Grecian language. Roscius frequently played without a mask, and in this respect probably he did not stand alone: but as far as we know, there never was any instance of it among the Greeks. The alteration in question might contribute to the more brilliant developement of his art, and the Romans, who were pleased with it, showed here also that they had a higher relish for the disproportionate and prominent talents of a virtuoso, than for the harmonious impression of a work of art, considered as a whole.

In the tragic literature of the Romans, there are two epochs; the first that of Livius Andronicus, Nævius, Ennius and also of Pacuvius and Attius, who both flourished somewhat later than Plautus and Terence; and the second, the refined epoch of the Augustan age. The former produced only translators and imitators of the Grecian works, but it is probable that they succeeded better in tragedy than in comedy. Elevation of expression usually appears somewhat unbending in a language not sufficiently cultivated, but still it may be attained by perseverance; but to catch the negligent grace of social raillery, we must ourselves be possessed of humour and refinement. Here however as well as in the case of Plautus and Terence, we have not a single fragment of the Greek original, to enable us to judge of the accuracy and general felicity of the copy; but a speech of considera-

ble length, of the *Freed Prometheus* of Attius, is in no respect unworthy of Æschylus, and is also, in versification, much more polished* than the productions of the Latin comic writers generally are. This earlier style was carried to perfection by Pacuvius and Attius, whose pieces kept their place on the stage, and seem to have had many admirers down to the times of Cicero, and even still later. Horace directs his jealous criticism against these, as well as all the other old poets.

It was the ambition of the contemporaries of Augustus, to measure their power with the Greeks in a more original manner; but their labours were not in every department attended with equal success. The number of amateurs who attempted to shine in tragedy was particularly great; and works of the Emperor himself are even mentioned. Hence there is every reason for supposing that Horace wrote his epistle to the Pisos, chiefly with the view of deterring these young men from so dangerous a career; as they were, probably, infected by the universal passion, without possessing the requisite talents. One of the most renowned tragic poets of this age was the celebrated *Asinius Pollio*, a man of an impassioned disposition, as Pliny informs us, and who, in plastic works, was fond of whatever bore the same character. It was he who brought with him the well known group of the Farnesian bull from Rhodes, and erected it at Rome. If his tragedies bore the same relation to those of Sophocles, which this bold, wild, but somewhat extravagant group does to the tranquil grandeur of Niobe, we have every reason to regret their loss. But the political importance of Pollio might easily blind his contemporaries with respect to the value of his poetical labours. *Ovid*, who tried so many departments of poetry, has also attempted tragedy, and is the author of a *Medea*. From the garrulous and common-place displays of passion in his *Heroides*, we might at most expect from him, in tragedy, a caricature of Euripides. Quintilian however asserts that he proved here, for once, what he could have done, had he chosen to restrain himself instead of yielding to his natural propensity to diffuseness.

These and all the other tragic attempts of the age of Augustus have perished. We cannot estimate with any degree of certainty

* In what syllabic metres could these tragedians translate the Grecian choral odes? Horace declares the imitation of Pindar, whose lyrical productions bear great resemblance to those of tragedy, altogether impracticable in Latin. Probably they never ventured into the labyrinths of the choral strophes, which were neither calculated for the language nor the ear of the Romans. The tragedies of Seneca never ascended higher beyond the anapest than a saphic or choriambic verse, which, when monotonously repeated, is very disagreeable to the ear.

the magnitude of the loss which we have here suffered, but from all appearances it is not extraordinarily great.—The Grecian tragedy had at first to struggle in Rome with all the inconveniences of a plant removed to a foreign soil; the Roman religion was in some degree related to the Greek, yet by no means so completely the same as many people suppose, but the heroic mythology of the Greeks was merely introduced into Rome by the poets, and was in nowise connected with the national recollections. The idea of an original Roman tragedy is now present to me, obscurely indeed, and in the back ground of time, and with that indistinctness which anything must have, which never issued from the bosom of possibility into existing reality. It ought to have been altogether different in substance and form from that of the Greeks, and conceived in the old Roman character of religion and patriotism. Everything like creative poetry can only be derived from the inward life of a people, and from religion, the root of that life. The spirit of the Roman religion was however originally, and before the substance of it was sacrificed to foreign ornament, quite different from that of the Grecian. The latter was plastically flexible, the former sacerdotally immutable. The Roman creed, and the customs founded on it, were more serious, moral, pious, displayed more insight into nature, and had something more of magic and mysticism, than that part at least, of the Greek religion, which was not included in the mysteries. As the Greek tragedy represented the struggle of man in a state of freedom with destiny, a true Roman tragedy ought to have exhibited the subjection of human impulse to the holy and binding force of religion, and the visible presence of that religion in all earthly things. But this spirit has been long extinguished, when the want of poetry of a cultivated description first began to be felt by them. The Patricians, in their origin an Etrurian sacerdotal school, had become mere statesmen and warriors, who considered their hereditary priesthood in no other light than that of a political form. Their sybilline books, their vedams, were then unintelligible to them, not so much from antiquity of character, as because they no longer possessed the higher knowledge which was the key to that sanctuary. What the Latin heroic tales might have become under an earlier development, as well as their peculiar colouring, we may still see, from some traces in Virgil, Propertius, and Ovid, who then however handled them as matters of antiquity.

Moreover, although the Romans were at length desirous of becoming thorough Hellenists, they were deficient in that milder humanity, of which we may observe traces in Grecian history, poetry, and art, even in the time of Homer. From the most

austere virtue, which, like Curtius, sacrificed every personal inclination to love of country, they proceeded, with the most fearful rapidity, to a state of corruption from avarice and luxury, equally without example. In their character they always betrayed that their first founder was not suckled at the breast of a woman, but of a raging wolf. They were the tragedians of the history of the world, who exhibited many a deep tragedy of kings led in chains and pining in dungeons; they were the iron necessity of other nations; universal destroyers for the sake of rearing at last, from the ruins, the mausoleum of their own dignity and freedom, in the midst of an obsequious world, reduced to one dull uniformity. It was not given to them to excite emotion by the mitigated accents of mental suffering, and to touch with a delicate hand every note of the scale of feeling. They naturally sought also in tragedy, by overleaping all intervening gradations, to reach at once the extreme, both in the stoicism of heroism, and the monstrous fury of criminal desires. Nothing of their ancient greatness had remained to them but the contempt of pain and death, when after an extravagant enjoyment of life they were at last called upon to submit to these evils. They then impressed this seal of their former grandeur on their tragic heroes, with a self-satisfied and ostentatious profusion.

Finally, in the age of polished literature, among a people fond, even to a degree of madness, of shows and spectacles, the dramatic poets were still in want of a poetical public. In the triumphal processions, the fights of gladiators and of wild beasts, all the splendour of the world, all the wonders of every clime, were brought before the eyes of the spectator, who was glutted with scenes of the most violent and bloody description. What effect could the more refined gradations of tragic pathos produce on nerves so steeled? It was the ambition of the powerful among them to exhibit in one day to the people, on stages erected for the purpose, and immediately afterwards destroyed, the immense plunder which they derived from foreign or civil war. The relation which Pliny gives of the architectural decoration of the stage erected by Scaurus, borders on the incredible. When magnificence could be carried no farther, they endeavoured to surprise by the novelty of mechanical inventions.—In this way, a Roman, at the burial solemnity of his father, caused two theatres to be constructed in honour of him, resting with their backs on each other, and made to move in such a manner on a single hinge, that at the end of the play, they were wheeled round with all the spectators within them, and formed together into one circus, in which combats of gladiators were exhibited. In the pleasure of the eyes that of the ears were altogether lost; rope dancers and white elephants

were preferred to every dramatic entertainment; the embroidered purple robes of the actor were applauded, as we are told by Horace, and so little attentive and quiet was the great body of the spectators, that he compares their noise to that of the roaring of the ocean, or of a mountain forest in a storm.

We have only one sample of the tragical talent of the Romans remaining, from which however it would be unjust to draw a conclusion with respect to the productions of better times; I allude to the ten tragedies which go by the name of *Seneca*. Their claim to this title appears very doubtful to me: perhaps it is founded merely on the circumstance of *Seneca* appearing in *Octavia*, one of these plays; but this would rather lead one to draw a different conclusion. The opinions of the learned are very much divided on the subject; some ascribe them partly to *Seneca* the philosopher, and partly to his father the rhetorician; others ascribe them to *Seneca*, a tragedian, a different person from both. Hence it is generally allowed that the different pieces are neither from the same hand, nor even of the same age. For the honour of the Roman taste we might be inclined to consider them the productions of a very late period of antiquity: but *Quintilian* quotes a verse from the *Medea* of *Seneca*, which is to be found in the play of that name in the collection in question, and therefore the authenticity of this piece cannot be doubted, though its merits do not seem to be in any way pre-eminent above the others.* We find also in *Lucan* a contemporary of *Nero*, a similar display of bombast, in which everything great is distorted to nonsense. The state of violence and constraint in which Rome was kept under a series of blood-thirsty tyrants, had also given an unnatural character to eloquence and poetry. The same thing has been observed in similar periods of modern history. Under the wise and mild government of a *Vespasian* and a *Titus*, and of a *Trajan* more especially, the Romans returned to a purer taste. But whatever period may have given birth to the tragedies of *Seneca*, they are beyond description bombastical and frigid, unnatural in character and action, revolting from their violation of every propriety, and so destitute of everything like theatrical effect, that I am inclined to believe they were never destined to leave the rhetorical schools for the stage. These productions have nothing in common with the old tragedies, those sublime creations of the poetical genius of the

* The author of this *Medea* makes the heroine strangle her children before the eyes of the people, notwithstanding the admonition of *Horace*, who probably had an example of the Roman theatre before his eyes; for a Greek would hardly have committed this error. The Roman tragedians must have had a particular relish for seeking novelty and effect in such horrible exhibitions.

Greeks, but the name, the outward form, and mythological materials; and yet they seem to have been composed with the obvious intention of excelling them; but they bear the same relation to the Grecian works, which a hollow hyperbole does to the most fervent truth. Every tragical common-place is spun out to the very last; all is phrase; and even the most common remark is delivered in stilted language. The most complete poverty of sentiment is dressed out with wit and acuteness. There is even a display of fancy in them, or at least a phantom of it; for they contain an example of the misapplication of every mental faculty. The authors have found out the secret of being diffuse, even to wearisomeness, and at the same time so epigrammatically laconic, as to be often obscure and unintelligible. Their characters are neither ideal nor actual beings, but gigantic puppets, who are at one time put in motion by the string of an unnatural heroism, and at another by that of a passion equally unnatural, which no guilt nor enormity can appal.

In a history of the dramatic art I should have altogether overlooked the tragedies of Seneca, if, from a blind prejudice for everything which has come down to us from antiquity, they had not been often imitated in modern times. They were more early and more generally known than the Greek tragedies. Not merely learned men, without a feeling for art, have judged favourably of them, nay preferred them to the Grecian tragedies, but even poets have accounted them deserving of their study and imitation. The influence of Seneca on Corneille's idea of tragedy cannot be mistaken; Racine too, in his *Phædra*, has condescended to borrow a good deal from him, and among other things, nearly the whole scene of the declaration of love, of all which we have an enumeration in Brumoy.

We now leave the productions of classical antiquity, and proceed to the dramatic literature of the moderns. Respecting the order most convenient for the subject of which we are about to treat, it may be doubtful whether we ought to consider, *seriatim*, what each nation has accomplished, or to proceed from one to another, according to the manner in which their influences have been reciprocally felt and crossed by each other. The productions of the Italian theatre, for instance, after its first revival, had an influence on the French at its commencement, but the influence of the latter was again felt by the Italian stage in a considerable degree. The French, before their stage had attained its full maturity, borrowed still more from the Spaniards than from the Italians, in later times, Voltaire attempted to enlarge their theatrical circle by an imitation of the English, but this was not productive of any great effect, from their ideas of imitation of the an-

cients, and from their taste in art, according to which everything had already been immutably fixed. The English and Spanish stages are nearly independent of all the rest, and also of one another; they have had a great influence on the theatres of other countries, but felt very little in return. But to avoid perplexity and confusion, it seems more advisable to separate the different literatures from each other, noticing at the same time the effects produced by foreign influence.—This is the more necessary, as in some of the modern nations the principle of imitation of the ancients has prevailed without limitation; and in others, the romantic spirit, or at least an originality altogether independent of classical models: the former is the case with the Italians and French, and the latter with the English and Spaniards.

I have already, in passing, alluded to the manner in which the then degenerate plays of the Greeks and Romans were abolished, by the introduction of Christianity, before even an end was put to everything like art, by the eruptions of the northern conquerors. After the long sleep of the dramatic and theatrical spirit in the middle ages, which began to awake again in mysteries and moralities, independent of classical models, the first endeavour to imitate the ancients in their theatre, as well as in other arts and departments of poetry, was made by the Italians. The *Sophonisba* of Trissino, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, is generally named as the first regular tragedy. I cannot boast of having ever read this literary rarity, but I know the author, on other subjects, to be a spiritless pedant; and as even the learned, who are the most earnest in their imitation of the ancients, declare it a dull work of diligence, without any poetical spirit, we may, without any farther examination, safely acquiesce in this decision. It is singular that, while all the ancient forms, even to the chorus, are scrupulously retained, the province of mythology is changed for that of the Roman History.

The pastoral dramas of *Tasso* and *Guarini*, which appeared towards the middle of the sixteenth century, and in which the subject, though for the most part not tragical, is however noble, and even ideal, may be considered to form an epoch in poetry. They are furnished with choruses of the most distinguished beauty, which float, no doubt, like lyrical voices in the air, and do not appear in person, and are still less introduced as constant witnesses of the transactions, according to rules of probability. These compositions were certainly destined for the theatre; they were represented with great pomp, and we may presume in a noble taste, at Ferrara and Turin. But even this gives us an idea of the infancy of the theatre at that time: although there is a general plot and catastrophe, yet the action stands still in single

scenes, and leads us to conclude that the spectators were but little accustomed to theatrical amusements, and consequently not difficult to please, and that they patiently waited the development of beautiful poetry without dramatic progress. The *Pastor fido* in particular, is an inimitable production: original and yet classical; romantic in the spirit of the love which it represents; in its form, distinguished by the grand and simple stamp of classical antiquity; with the sweet triflings of poetry, full of the high and chaste beauty of feeling. No poet has succeeded so well in combining the peculiarities of the modern and antique. He displays a profound feeling of the essence of ancient tragedy; for the idea of fate animates the subject of his piece, and the principal characters may be said to be ideal: he has also introduced caricatures, and on that account called the composition a tragic-comedy; but they are only caricatures from their sentiments, and not from the vulgarity of their manners; in the same manner as, in ancient tragedy, even the subordinate persons, slaves, or messengers, are invested with a portion of the general dignity.

This production is of the utmost importance in the history of poetry in general; but it had no effect on dramatic poetry, and the thing could hardly be otherwise.

I return now to what may properly be called, the tragedy of the Italians. After Sophonisba, and a few pieces of the same period, which Calsabigi calls the first tragic lisplings of Italy, a number of works of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries are cited; but there is nothing among them which has acquired any particular reputation, or which at any rate has preserved it. Although all these writers laboured, as they thought, according to the rules of Aristotle, we have the following picture of their tragical abortions from Calsabigi, a critic altogether devoted to the French system: "Distorted, complicated, improbable plots, misconception of scenic regulations, useless personages, double actions, inconsistency of character, gigantic or childish thoughts, feeble verses, affected phrases, the total absence of harmonious and natural poetry; all this decked out with ill-timed descriptions and similes, or idle philosophical and political disquisitions; in every scene some silly amour, with all the trite insipidity of common-place gallantry; of tragic strength, of the conflict of passions, of overpowering theatrical catastrophes, not the smallest trace." We cannot prevail on ourselves to rummage through the whole of the lumber of forgotten literature, and we shall therefore immediately proceed to the consideration of the *Merope* of Maffei, which appeared in the beginning of the eighteenth century. Its success in Italy was great on its first publication; and in other countries it obtained an uncommon degree

of reputation from the competition of Voltaire. The object of both was to restore in some measure a lost piece of Euripides, highly praised by the ancients, from the account given of its contents by Hyginus. Voltaire, under the guise of eulogy, has criticised the *Merope* of Maffei, like a rival; and there is a lengthened criticism on it in the *Dramaturgie* of Lessing, equally ingenious and impartial. He pronounces it, notwithstanding its purity and simplicity of taste, as the work of a learned antiquary, rather than of a mind naturally adapted for, and practised in the dramatic art. We must attribute therefore the great reputation of this work to the previous state of the drama in Italy.

After Maffei came *Metastasio* and *Alfieri*; the first before the middle, and the other in the latter part of the eighteenth century. I here include the musical dramas of Metastasio, because their general aim is to produce a serious and pathetic effect, because they lay claim to ideality of conception, and because in their external form there is in part an observance of what is considered as belonging to regular tragedy. Both poets, although totally different in their aim, were however influenced in common by the productions of the French stage. It is true they have both declared themselves too decidedly against this school to be considered as properly belonging to it; they have assured us that they purposely avoided reading the French models, for the sake of preserving their own originality. But this very precaution appears somewhat suspicious: whoever feels himself perfectly secure in his own independence may without any hesitation study the works of his predecessors; he will derive from them an improvement in art, and yet be enabled to stamp his peculiar character on his own productions. If it is really true that these poets never in reality perused the French tragedies, or only after the completion of their works, some imperceptible influence must have diffused itself throughout the atmosphere, which determined them without their own consciousness. This is very conceivable from the great reputation which, since the time of Louis XIV. the French tragedies have not only enjoyed with the learned, but also with the fashionable world throughout all Europe; from the new modelling of several foreign theatres according to the French cut; from the prevailing tone of criticism, in which negative correctness was everything, a tone which France gave to the literature of other countries. The affinity is in both undeniable, but more striking in Alfieri, from the intermixture of the musical element in Metastasio. I find it in the total absence of the romantic spirit; in a certain fanciless insipidity of composition; in the manner of handling mythological and historical materials, which is neither properly mythological nor historical; lastly, in

the aim to produce a tragic purity, which degenerates into monotony. The unities of place and time have been uniformly observed by Alfieri; the latter could only be observed by Metastasio, as a change of scene was required of the opera poet. Alfieri affords in general no food for the eyes. In his plots he aimed at the antique simplicity, while Metastasio in his rich intrigues followed Spanish models, and borrowed, in particular, a great deal from Calderon.* Yet the harmonious ideality of the ancients was as foreign to the one, as the charm of the romantic poets, arising from the indissoluble mixture of elements apparently incongruous, was to the other.

Even before Metastasio, *Apostolo Zeno* had purified, as it is called, the opera, a phrase which, in the sense of modern critics, often means the depriving a thing of substance and vigour. He formed it on tragedy, and the French tragedy more especially; and a too faithful, or perhaps too slavish approximation to this model, is the very cause why he left so little room for musical development, on which account his pieces were immediately driven by his more expert successor from the stage of the opera. It is in general a false direction in art, to attempt to introduce into one species, with evident disadvantages and at the expense of its own peculiar beauties, what can be accomplished more perfectly in another. This originates in a chilling idea of regularity, established at once for all subjects, instead of observing the spirit of each, and ascertaining the peculiar laws by which it ought to be regulated.

Metastasio threw Zeno into the shade, as, with the same object in view, he displayed a greater flexibility in accommodating himself to the wants of the musician. The merits which have gained him the reputation of a classic among the Italians of the present day, and which have made him in some degree for them what Racine is for the French, are, the most perfect purity, clearness, elegance, and sweetness of language in general, and in particular, the softest melody and the greatest loveliness in the songs. Perhaps no poet ever possessed in a greater degree the talent of comprehending in a few lines the essential features of a pathetic situation; the songs with which the characters make their exit, are almost always the purest musical extract of their state of mind which can possibly be given. But we must own at the same time, that his pictures of passion are all general: his pathos is purified, not only from all characteristical, but from all contemplative substance; and the poetic conception, being of no

* This is expressly asserted by the learned Spaniard Artcaga in his Italian work on the History of the Opera.

great weight, proceeds unremittingly with a light and easy motion, the care of a richer developement being left to the musician. Metastasio is musical throughout; but, to follow up the simile, we may observe that of the poetical music, he possesses only the part of melody, without any knowledge of harmony, or the mysterious effects of counterpoint. Or to express myself in a different language, he is musical, but in no respect picturesque. His melodies are light and pleasant, but they are repeated with small variation; when we have read a few of his pieces we are acquainted with all of them, and the composition is always as a whole without signification. His heroes are gallant like those of Corneille, his heroines tender like those of Racine; but this has been too sharply censured by many without a due consideration of the wants of the opera. It appears to me that he is only censurable for the selection of materials, the severe seriousness of which were incapable of being mixed up with such triflings without a striking incongruity. Had Metastasio not laid hold of great historical names, had he borrowed his objects more frequently from mythology, or from compositions of a still more fanciful nature, had he always made the same happy choice which he has exhibited in his Achilles in Scyros, where, from the nature of the subject, the heroic is interwoven with the idyllic, we might then have pardoned him for universally painting all his characters in love. We should then willingly have permitted him to indulge in fanciful allusions of a still bolder description, if we ourselves have an understanding of what we ought to expect from an opera. By his tragical pretensions he has injured himself: his powers were not suited to the task, and the seductive flattery at which he aimed was incapable of union with overpowering energy. I have heard a celebrated Italian poet assert that his countrymen were moved to tears by Metastasio. We can only get over such a national evidence as this, by accounting for the circumstance as a symptom of the moral constitution of the Italians. It appears to me undeniable, that a certain melting effeminacy in feeling and expression rendered Metastasio the delight of his contemporaries. He has lines which, from their dignity and vigorous conciseness, are perfectly suited to tragedy, and yet we perceive a certain something in them, which seems to show that they were destined for the flexible throat of a soprano singer.

The astonishing fortune of Metastasio throughout all Europe, and especially at court, must also in a great measure be attributed to his being a court poet, not merely by profession, but also by the manner in which he composed, which was exactly that of the tragedians of the age of Louis XIV.—Superficial splendour without depth; prosaic sentiments and thoughts decked out with a

choice poetical language; a courtly moderation in everything, in the display of passion, and in the exhibition of misfortune and crime; observation of the proprieties and apparent morality, for in these dramas voluptuousness is merely breathed, but never named, and the heart is always in every mouth; it was impossible that all these properties should not recommend such tragical miniatures to the world of fashion. The pomp of noble sentiments is not spared, but they are closely followed by traits of baseness, perpetrated with a levity peculiar to Metastasio. It not unfrequently happens that an injured fair one dismisses her lover with the intention of stabbing him behind. In almost all the pieces there appears a crafty knave who plays the traitor, for whom there is always in readiness a display of royal magnanimity, to make all matters even at the end. This levity with which base falsehood is taken into favour, as if it were merely an amiable weakness, would have appeared extremely disgusting, if his tragical incidents had taken a serious turn. But the poisoned cup is always at the seasonable instant dashed from the lips; the daggers are either dropped, or they are forced from the hands of those who intend to use them, before the deadly blow can be struck; the utmost injury received is a slight scratch; and there is always some subterranean exit, affording the means of flight from the dungeon and from death. The dread of the ridiculous, that conscience of all poets who write for the world of fashion, is very visible in his avoiding all bold measures not sanctioned by custom, in his avoiding everything supernatural, because a public of this description carries with it no belief in wonders, even to the fantastic stage of the opera. Yet this dread has not always served as a sure guide to Metastasio: besides an extravagant use of *aside*, which often appears ludicrous, the subordinate loves assume frequently the appearance of being intended as a parody of the others. Here the Abbé, who was thoroughly acquainted with the various gradations of *cicisbeism*, its pains and its pleasures, at once betrays himself. To the favoured lover there is generally opposed another, whose presence is felt as an incumbrance, and who continues to urge his suit without return, the *soffione* among the *cicisbei*; the former loves in all stillness, and frequently finds no opportunity till the end of the piece, of offering his well turned declaration of love: we might call him the *patito*. This unintermitting love-chase is not confined to the male parts, but extended also to the female, that in everything the most brilliant contrasts may be exhibited.

A few only of the operas of Metastasio still keep possession of the stage, as the change of taste in music demands a different arrangement of the text. Metastasio seldom has choruses, and his

airs are almost always for a single voice: with these the scenes are uniformly terminated, and the singer never fails to make his exit with them. It appears as if, proud of having exhibited this highest triumph of his feeling, he left the spectators to their astonishment, whenever the chirping of the passions in the recitatives rose in the air, to something like the more full tones of the nightingale. In an opera we now require more frequent duos and trios, and a crashing finale. In fact, the most difficult problem for the opera poet is the mixing the complicated voices of conflicting passions in one common harmony, without injuring their essence: a problem however which is generally solved by both poet and musical composer in a very arbitrary manner.

Alfieri, a bold and proud man, disdained to please by such meretricious means as those of which Metastasio had availed himself: he was highly incensed at the emasculated and degraded state of his countrymen, and the degeneracy of his contemporaries in general. This rage stimulated him to the exhibition of a manly strength of mind, of stoical principles, and free opinions, and on the other hand to depict all the horrors and enormities of despotism. The enthusiasm was political and moral in a much greater degree than it was poetical, and we must praise his tragedies as the actions of the man rather than as the works of the poet.—From his great disinclination to pursue the same path with Metastasio, he naturally fell into the opposite extreme: I should be disposed to call him a Metastasio reversed. If the muse of the latter is a love-sick nymph, the muse of Alfieri, is an Amazon. He gave her a Spartan education, he aimed at being the Cato of the theatre; but he forgot that, although the tragic poet may himself be a stoic, tragic poetry itself must never be stoical, if it would move and agitate us. His language is so destitute of imagery, that his characters seem altogether deprived of fancy; it is broken and harsh: he wished to steel it anew, and it thereby not only lost its splendour, but became brittle and inflexible. He is not only not musical, but positively too anti-musical; he tortures our feelings by the harshest dissonance, without any softening or solution.—Tragedy, from its elevation of sentiment, ought in some degree to disentangle our minds from the sensual power of the body; but to do this with effect, it must not attempt to strip this dangerous gift of heaven of its charms: it must rather show us the highest majesty of our existence surrounded by abysses. When we read the tragedies of Alfieri, the world appears in general in an obscure and repulsive aspect to us. A style of composition in which the ordinary course of human affairs is exhibited as dark and gloomy, and the only variety is the horror of the extraordinary catastrophes, resembles a

climate in which the perpetual fogs of a northern winter are only illumined by the fiery storm of the torrid zone. We must expect as little characteristical depth and refinement in Alfieris in *Metastasio*: he exhibits only the opposite partial view of human nature. His characters are in the same manner cast according to naked and general ideas, and he frequently paints the extremes of black and white beside one another, without any intervening gradation. His knaves, for the most part, exhibit all their deformity in their exterior; this might pass, although such a picture will hardly enable us to recognize them in real life; but his virtuous persons are not amiable, and this is a matter of much more serious importance. He studiously stripped himself of all the seductive graces, and even of all subordinate charms and ornaments (as if they had not been sufficiently denied by nature to this caustic genius), with the view of promoting his moral aim, as he thought, without reflecting that the poet has no other means of leading the minds of men than the fascinations of his art.

From the tragedy of the Greeks, with which he first became acquainted towards the end of his career, he was separated by a wide chasm; and I cannot consider his pieces as an improvement on the French tragedy. Their structure is more simple, the dialogue in some cases less conventional; the dismissal of confidants has been highly extolled as a difficulty overcome by him, and an improvement of the French system; he had the same aversion to chamberlains and court ladies in poetry as in real life. But his pieces bear no comparison with the better French tragedies in pleasing and brilliant eloquence; they also display much less skill in the plot, in the gradations, preparations, and transitions. Compare, for instance, the *Britannicus* of Racine with the *Octavia* of Alfieri. Both drew their materials from Tacitus; but which of them displayed the most perfect understanding of this profound master of the human heart? Racine appears here as a man who was thoroughly acquainted with all the corruptions of a court, and who saw ancient Rome under the Emperors in this glass of observation. On the other hand, if Alfieri did not expressly assure us that his *Octavia* was a daughter of Tacitus, we might be inclined to believe that she was modelled on that of the pretended Seneca. The colours with which he paints tyrants are those of the school rhetoricians. In his blustering and raging Nero, can we recognize the man who seemed formed by nature, as Tacitus says, "to conceal his hatred under caresses?"—the cowardly Sybarite, fantastically vain till the very last moment of his existence, cruel at the first from fear, and afterwards from the extravagance of desire?

If Alfieri has been here unfaithful to Tacitus, he has proved

himself not less superficial in his attempt to translate Macchiavel into the language of poetry, in the *Conspiracy of the Pazzi*. In this and other pieces from modern history, *Philip and Don Garcia*, he has by no means hit the spirit and tone of modern times, nor even of his own nation: his ideas of the tragic style were at variance with everything like a local and determinate costume. It is astonishing to see how the subjects borrowed from the tragic cycles of the Greeks, as the *Orestiad*, for instance, lose all their heroic magnificence in his hands, and assume a modern and almost vulgar air. He has succeeded best in painting the public life of the Roman republic; and it is a great merit in *Virginia* that the action takes place in the forum, and in part before the eyes of the people. On other occasions the scene chosen by him is for the most part so invisible and indeterminate in its observed unity of place, that one would imagine it was some out of the way corner, where nobody came but persons involved in transactions of an unpleasant nature. The stripping his kings and heroes altogether of their external pomp, produces the impression that the world is actually depopulated around them. This stage solitude is very striking in *Saul*, the scene of which is laid between two armies on the point of coming to a decisive battle, though this piece is in other respects highly superior to the rest, from a certain oriental splendour, and from the lyrical sublimity in which the troubled mind of Saul is expressed. *Myrrha* is too bold an attempt to give a colour of propriety to a subject equally revolting to the senses and the feelings. The Spaniard Arteaga has criticised this tragedy and that of Philip with great severity, but with great truth.

I reserve for the review of the present condition of the Italian theatre my remarks on what has been produced since the time of Alfieri, and return to give a short sketch of the history of comedy.

In this department the Italians were not at first sufficiently attentive in their imitation of the ancients to the difference of times and manners, and translations of Plautus and Terence were represented on the oldest theatres; but they soon fell into the most singular extravagancies. We have comedies of *Ariosto* and *Macchiavel*; of the former in rimeless verse, *versi sdruccioli*, and even one in prose of the latter. Such men could produce nothing which would not bear traces of their genius. But Ariosto in the cut of his pieces kept too close to the invention of the ancients, and exhibited therefore no living picture of the manners of his times. In Macchiavel this is only the case in his *Clizia*, an imitation of Plautus; the *Mandragola*, and another comedy without a name, are sufficiently Florentine; but unfortunately

they are not of a very edifying description. A simple husband who is deceived, and a hypocritical and pandering monk, play the principal parts. Inventions in the style of the free and merry tales of Boccaccio are boldly and bluntly conveyed in the form of dialogue, but with respect to theatrical effect they do not display any great art. As *Mimi*, that is, as pictures of the language of ordinary life with all its idiotisms, these productions are much to be commended. They resemble the Latin comic poets in their indecency. This was indeed the general tone. The comedies of *Pietro Aretino* are merely remarkable for their immodesty. It seems as if these writers, deeming the spirit of a more refined love inconsistent with the essence of comedy, had exhausted the very lees of the sensual amours of the Greek comedy.

At an earlier period, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, there was one unsuccessful attempt to dramatise a serious novel, as a middle species between comedy and tragedy, and to adorn it with poetical splendour: the *Virginia of Accolti*. I have never had an opportunity of reading it, but the unfavourable report of a literary man disposes me to think favourably of it.* According to his description, it must resemble the older pieces of the Spanish stage before it was yet sufficiently formed, and in common with them the stanza measure is used in it. The attempts at romantic drama have always failed in Italy, whereas in Spain again all endeavours to model the theatre according to the rules of the ancients, and latterly of the French, have uniformly been abortive, from the difference of national taste.

We have a comedy from *Tasso*, *Gli Intrichi d'Amore*, which ought rather to be called a lengthened romance in the form of dialogue. So many and such wonderful events are crowded together within the narrow limit of five acts, that one incident treads closely upon the heels of another without the least development, which gives an unsupportable hardness to the whole. Criminal designs are portrayed with indifference, and the drolle-ry is made to consist in the manner in which an event anticipates its consequences. We cannot here recognize the Tasso whose tender feelings for love, chivalry, and honour are pronounced so delightfully in his *Jerusalem Delivered*, on which account it has

* *Bouterwek's Geschichte der Poesie und Beredsamkeit.—Erster Band*, s. 334, &c.—M. Bouterwek has made himself ridiculous by saying: "A poet with any knowledge of dramatic interest would hardly have attempted to convert this story into an ordinary comedy." Did he know or reflect that the story, as related by him, agrees accurately in every circumstance with the plot of Shakespeare's *All's Well that ends Well*? That Accolti in this comedy did not trouble himself with the unities of time and place (it was indeed impossible for him to observe them) draws down on him the vengeance of M. Bouterwek. Alas for the fate of poor Shakespeare in this History of Poetry!

been doubted if this work ought really to be attributed to him. The richness of invention, if we may give this name to a rude accumulation of incidents, is so great, that the attention is tortured in the most painful manner, in endeavouring to avoid confounding one thing with another.

We have a multitude of Italian comedies written about this period, and planned in the same manner, only with less order and connexion, the chief aim being to delight by means of indecency. A parasite and procuress are standing characters in all of them. Among the comic poets of this class, *Giambattista Porta* deserves to be distinguished. His plots are, it is true, like those of the rest, imitations of Plautus and Terence, or dramatized tales; but a tender feeling is breathed throughout the love-dialogues, which he seems to have laboured with peculiar fondness, a feeling which forces its way through the rudeness of Italian comedy, and which is so much at variance with the nature of the materials.

In the seventeenth century, when the Spanish theatre flourished in all its glory, the Italians seem to have borrowed frequently from it; but they must have disfigured the subjects which they so took from not having a due understanding of them. The neglect of the regular stage was increased by the passion for the opera, in which everything else was swallowed up, and by the invincible taste of the body of the people for improvisatory farces with standing masks. These last are not to be despised: they fix, as it were, many central points of the national character, in the comic exhibition of peculiarities of speech, dress, &c. Their recurrence does not by any means exclude the greatest diversity in the plot of the pieces, for it is as in chess, with a small number of men, every person having his determinate course, an endless number of combinations is possible. But extemporary playing easily degenerates into insipidity; this may have been the case in Italy, notwithstanding the Italians possess a great fund of drollery and fantastic wit, and a peculiar felicity in farcical gesticulation.

About the middle of the last century, *Goldoni* appeared as a reformer of the Italian comedy, and his success was so great, that he remained almost exclusively in possession of the comic stage. He is certainly not deficient in theatrical skill; but, as the event has proved, his substance, his depth of character, his novelty and richness of invention, are not such as to ensure a durable reputation. His pictures of manners are true, but not sufficiently elevated above the range of everyday life; he has exhausted the surface of life; and as there is little progression in his dramas, and everything turns usually on the same point, this adds to the impression of shallowness and ennui. He would willingly have

abolished masks altogether, but he could hardly have afforded a sufficient compensation from his own means; he retained only a few of them, as Harlequin, Brighella, and Pantaloon, and limited their parts. He fell into a great uniformity of character, which indeed he partly confesses from his repetition of names; for instance, his Beatrice and Rosaura are always the one a lively, and the other a feeling young woman, and for any farther distinction it is not to be found in him.

The excessive admiration of Goldoni, and the injury sustained by the masked comedy; for which the company of Sacchi in Venice possessed the highest talents, gave rise to the dramas of *Gozzi*. They are fairy tales in a dramatic form, in which however, along with the wonderful, versified, and serious part, he introduced the whole of the masks, and allowed them the most unrestrained development. They are pieces for effect, if ever there were such pieces, of great boldness and plot, still more fantastic than romantic, although he was the first of the comic poets of Italy who showed any feeling for honour and love. The execution is by no means careful or skilful, but dashed off in the manner of a sketch. With all his whimsical boldness he is still extremely familiar; the principal motives are detailed with the most unambiguous perspicuity, all the touches are coarse and vigorous: he says, he knows well that his countrymen are fond of the most robust situations. After his imagination had been in some degree wearied with oriental tales, he applied himself to the re-modelling of Spanish plays, particularly those of Calderon; but here he is deserving of much less praise. The ethereal and delicately shaded poetry of the Spaniard is uniformly vulgarized by him, and exhibited in glaring colours; the weight of his masks draws the ærial texture to the ground, as the humorous introduction of the *gracioso* in the Spanish is of a much more refined character. This extravagant caricature of the masked parts served as an admirable contrast to the wildly wonderful nature of the fairy tale. The character of the pieces was, in the serious part, as well as in the accompanying drollery, equally removed from natural truth. In this manner Gozzi fell almost accidentally on a fund of the deepest import, of which he was not himself perhaps aware: his prosaical, and for the most part improvisatory, masks, formed altogether of themselves the irony of the poetical part. What I mean by irony, I shall explain more fully when I come to the justification of the mixture of the tragic and comic in the romantic drama of Shakspeare and Calderon. I shall only here observe, that it is a sort of confession interwoven into the subject itself, and expressed with more or less distinctness, of its overcharged partiality in matters of fancy and feeling, by means

of which the equilibrium is again restored. The Italians were not however aware of this, and Gozzi has not found any followers to carry his rude sketches to a higher degree of perfection. Instead of combining like him, only in a more refined manner, the charms of wonderful poetry with exhilarating mirth; instead of comparing Gozzi, notwithstanding the great disparity, with the foreign masters of the romantic drama, and from the unconscious affinity between them in spirit and plan, drawing the conclusion that the common principle was founded in nature; the Italians have contented themselves with considering the pieces of Gozzi as the wild offspring of an extravagant imagination, and with banishing them from the stage. The comedy with masks is held in contempt by the classes who suppose themselves polished, as if they were too wise for this exhibition, and it is abandoned by them to the common people at the Sunday representations in the theatres and in puppet-shows. Although this contempt must have an injurious influence on masks, as no actor of talents devotes himself to them, so that they are altogether destitute of examples of the spirited and witty manners in which they were formerly filled, this species is still however the only one in which we find original and truly theatrical entertainment in Italy.*

In tragedy they generally imitate Alfieri, who, although it is the prevailing fashion to admire him, expresses his thoughts in too strong and manly a manner, to be supportable on the stage. They have produced single pieces of merit, but the principles of tragic art which Alfieri followed are altogether false, and in the bawling and heartless declamation of their actors, this tragic poetry, stripped with stoical severity of all the charms of grouping, of musical harmony, and of everything like tender feeling, is represented with the most deadening uniformity and monotony.†

One of their living poets, *Giovanni Pindemonti*, has endeavoured to introduce greater extent, variety, and nature into his historical plays, but he has been severely handled by their critics

* A few years ago, I saw in Milan an excellent *Truffaldin*, or Harlequin, and here and there in obscure theatres, and even in puppet-shows, admirable representations of the old traditional jokes of the country.

† As all the rich rewards are reserved for the singers, it is natural that their players, who are only introduced as a sort of fill up between singing and dancing, should, for the most part, not even possess the A, B, C, of their art, a pure pronunciation, and a cultivated memory. They have no idea that their parts ought to be got by heart, and hence we hear every piece almost twice over in an Italian theatre; the prompter speaks as loud as a good player elsewhere, and in order to be distinguished from him they bawl most insufferably. It is exceedingly amusing to see the prompter, when from the general forgetfulness a scene threatens to fall into confusion, labouring away, and stretching out his head from his hole like a serpent, hurrying through the dialogue before the different speakers, and entering into their parts. Of all the actors in the world, I conceive those of Paris to have their parts best by heart; in this, as well as in the knowledge of versification, the Germans are far inferior to them.

for descending from the height of the cothurnus to attain a truth of circumstance, without which it is impossible for this species of drama to exist; perhaps also for deviating from the strict observation of the traditional rules, so blindly adored by them. If the Italian verse is in fact so fastidious as not to bear many historical peculiarities, modern names and titles for instance, let them write partly in prose, and call the production not a tragedy, but an historical drama. It seems in general to be assumed as an undoubted principle, that the *verso sciolto* of eleven syllables without rhyme is the only one fit for the drama, but this does not seem to me to be by any means proved. This verse, in variety and metrical signification, is greatly inferior to the English and German rhymeless iambic, from its uniform feminine termination, and from there being merely an accentuation in Italian, without any syllabic measure; in the frequent transition of the sense from verse to verse, according to every possible division, the lines flow into one another without its being possible for the ear to separate them. Alfieri imagined that he had found out the genuine dramatic manner of treating this verse corresponding to his dialogue, which consists of nothing but detached periods, or rather of propositions entirely unperiodical and abruptly terminated. It is possible that he carried with him into his works a personal peculiarity, for he was exceedingly laconic; he was also, as he himself relates, determined by the example of Seneca: but what a different lesson he would have learned from the Greeks! We do not, it is true, connect our language so much in conversation as in an oratorical harangue, but the opposite extreme is equally unnatural. We observe a certain continuity in our common discourse, we give a developement to arguments and objections, and in an instant we are animated by passion to a fulness of expression, to a flow of eloquence, and even to lyrical sublimity. The ideal dialogue of tragedy may therefore find in actual conversation all the various tones and turns of poetry, with the exception of epic repose. I should therefore conceive the manner of Metastasio, and of Tasso, and Guarini before him, in their pastoral dramas, to be much more pleasant and suitable than the monotonous verse of eleven syllables: they intermix verses of seven syllables, and occasionally, after a number of blank lines, introduce a couple of rhymes, and even insert a rhyme in the middle of a verse. From this the transition to more measured strophes, either in *ottave rime*, or in lyrical metres, would be easy. Rhyme, and the connexion which it occasions, having nothing in them inconsistent with the essence of dramatic dialogue, and the rejection of a change of measure in the drama rests merely on a chilling idea of regularity.

No suitable versification has yet been invented in Italy for comedy. The *verso sciolto*, as is well known, does not answer; it is not sufficiently familiar. The verse of twelve syllables, with a *sdrucchiolo* termination selected by Ariosto, is much better, resembling the trimeter of the ancients, but is still somewhat monotonous. It has been however but little cultivated. The Martellian verse, a bad imitation of the Alexandrine, is a downright torture to the ear. Chiari, and occasionally Goldoni, at last used it, and Gozzi by way of derision. It still remains therefore to the prejudice of a more elegant style in prose.

Of new comedies the Italians have none; if they have, the pictures of manners are still more dull and superficial than those of Goldoni, without drollery, without invention, and, from their everyday common-place, downrightly disgusting. But they have acquired a just relish for the sentimental drama and familiar tragedy; they play with great fondness the popular German pieces of this description, and even produce the most detestable imitations of them. From being accustomed to operas and ballets, their favourite dramatic amusements, in which nothing more is attempted than a beautiful air or an elegant movement, from time to time, it would seem that the public have altogether lost all sense of dramatic connexion: they are perfectly well satisfied with two acts from different operas in the same evening, or with seeing the representation of the last act of an opera before the first.

We do not therefore believe that we are saying too much when we affirm, that both dramatic poetry and the histrionic art are in the most woful decline in Italy,* that the first foundation of a national theatre has not yet been laid, and that there is no prospect of their ever having one, till the prevailing ideas on the subject undergo a total change.

* Calsabigi attributes the cause of this state to the want of permanent companies of players, and of a capital. In this last reason there is certainly some foundation: in England, Spain, and France, a national system of dramatic art has been developed and established; in Italy and Germany, where there are only capitals of separate states, but no general metropolis, great difficulties are opposed to the improvement of the theatre. Calsabigi could not adduce the obstacles arising from a false theory, for he was himself under their influence.

LECTURE IX.

Antiquities of the French stage.—Influence of Aristotle and the imitation of the ancients.—Investigation of the three unities.—What is unity of action?—Unity of time.—Was it observed by the Greeks?—Unity of place as connected with it.—Mischief resulting from too narrow rules on the subject.

WE now proceed to the dramatic literature of the French. We find no reason for dwelling at any length on the first beginnings of tragedy in France. We may therefore leave to the French critics the task of depreciating the antiquities of their own literature, which they do with the mere view of adding to the glory of the succeeding age of Richelieu and Louis XIV. Their language, it is true, was then for the first time elaborated from the most indescribable wilderness of tastelessness and barbarity, while the harmonious diction of the Italian and Spanish poetry, which had long before developed itself without effort in the most beautiful luxuriance, was at that time rapidly degenerating. Hence, we are not to be astonished that the French lay such great stress on all the negative excellencies, and endeavour so much to avoid everything like impropriety, and that from the dread of a relapse, this has always, since the period in question, been the general object of their critical labours. When La Harpe says of the tragedies of Corneille, that their tone rises above flatness only to fall into the opposite extreme of affectation, in the proofs which he adduces we see no reason to differ from him.—A contemporary piece of Legouv , *The Death of Henry the Fourth*, has been lately printed, which is not only written in a ludicrous style, but in the general plan and distribution of the subject, with its prologue spoken by Satan and a chorus of pages, with its endless monologues and want of progress and action, betrays the infancy of the dramatic art, not a naive infancy full of hope and expectation, but one disfigured by the most pedantic bombast and absurdity. With respect to the earlier tragical attempts of the French in the last half of the sixteenth, and the first third part of the seventeenth century, we refer to Fontenelle, La Harpe, the *Melanges litt raires* of Suard and Andr . We shall confine ourselves to the characterization of three of their most celebrated tragic poets, *Corneille*, *Racine* and *Voltaire*, who it would seem have given an immutable shape to their tragic stage. Our chief object however is an examination of the *system of tragic art*, practically followed by these poets, and by them partly, but by the French critics universally, considered

as alone entitled to any authority, and every deviation from it viewed as a sin against good taste. If the system is in itself the best, we shall be compelled to allow that its execution is masterly, perhaps not to be surpassed. But the great question here is, how far the French tragedy is in spirit and inward essence related to the Greek, and whether it deserves to be considered as an improvement upon it.

Of their first attempts it is only consistent with our object to observe, that the endeavour to imitate the ancients displayed itself at a very early period in France; and that they considered that the surest method of succeeding in this endeavour was to observe the strictest outward regularity of form, of which they derived their ideas more from Aristotle, and especially from Seneca, than from an intimate acquaintance with the Greek models themselves. In the first tragedies which were represented, the Cleopatra and Dido of *Jodelle*, a prologue and chorus were introduced: *Jean de la Peruse* translated the Medea of Seneca; *Garnier's* pieces are all taken from the Greek tragedies or from Seneca, but in the execution they bear a much closer resemblance to the latter. The writers of that day employed themselves also diligently on the Sophonisbe of Trissino, from a regard for its classic appearance. Whoever is acquainted with the mode of proceeding of real genius, which is impelled by the almost unconscious and immediate contemplation of great and important truths, and in nowise by mediate convictions obtained from deductions drawn in a roundabout way, will be on that account extremely suspicious of all activity in art, which originates in an abstract theory. But Corneille did not, like an antiquary, execute his dramas as so many learned school exercises, on the model of the ancients. Seneca, it is true, led him astray, but he knew and loved the Spanish theatre, and it had a great influence on his mind. The first of his pieces with which it is generally allowed that the classical epoch of French tragedy begins, and which is certainly one of his best, the *Cid*, is well known to have been borrowed from the Spanish. It violates considerably the unity of place, if not also that of time, and it is animated throughout by the spirit of chivalrous love and honour. But the opinion of his contemporaries, that a tragedy must be framed accurately according to the rules of Aristotle, was so universally prevalent that it bore down all opposition. Corneille, almost at the close of his dramatic career, began to entertain scruples of conscience, and endeavoured in a separate treatise to prove that his pieces, in the composition of which he had never even thought of Aristotle, were however all accurately written according to his rules. This was no easy task, for he was

obliged to have recourse to all manner of forced explanations. If he had established his case satisfactorily, we could only infer from it that the rules of Aristotle must be very loose and indeterminate, if such dissimilar works in spirit and form, as the tragedies of the Greeks and those of Corneille, should be equally true to them.

It is quite otherwise with Racine: of all the French poets he was, without doubt, the one who was best acquainted with the ancients, and he did not merely study them as a scholar, he felt them as a poet. He found however the practice of the theatre already firmly established, and he did not undertake to deviate from it for the sake of approaching these models. He only therefore appropriated the separate beauties of the Greek poets; but whether from respect for the taste of his age, or from inclination, he remained faithful to the prevailing gallantry so foreign to the Greek tragedy, and for the most part made it the foundation of the intrigues of his piece.

Such was nearly the state of the French theatre till Voltaire made his appearance. He possessed but a moderate knowledge of the Greeks, of whom however he now and then spoke with enthusiasm, that on other occasions he might rank them below the more modern masters of his own nation, including himself; but yet he always considered himself bound to preach up the grand severity and simplicity of the Greeks as essential to tragedy. He censured the deviations of his predecessors as errors, and insisted on purifying and at the same time enlarging the stage, as in his opinion, from the constraint of court manners, it had been almost straitened to the dimensions of an anti-chamber. He at first spoke of the bursts of genius in Shakspeare, and borrowed many things from this poet, at that time altogether unknown to his countrymen; he insisted too on greater depth in the delineation of passion, on a more powerful theatrical effect; he demanded a scene ornamented in a more majestic manner; and, lastly, he not unfrequently endeavoured to give to his pièces a political or philosophical interest altogether foreign to poetry. His labours have unquestionably been of utility to the French stage, although in language and versification (which in the classification of dramatic excellencies ought only to hold a secondary place, though in France they are alone decisive of the fate of a piece), he is, by most critics, considered as inferior to his predecessors, or at least to Racine. It is now the fashion to attack this idol of the last age on every point with the most unrelenting and partial hostility. His innovations on the stage are therefore cried down as so many literary heresies, even by the critical watchmen, who seem to think that the age of Louis XIV. has

left nothing remaining throughout every succession of ages till the very end of the world, but a passive admiration of its perfections, and who therefore will not listen to the unhallowed idea of anything like improvement. For authority is avowed with so little disguise as the first principle of the French critics, that this expression is quite current with them.

In so far as we have to express doubts of the unconditional authority of the rules followed by the old French tragic authors, of the pretended affinity between the spirit of their works, and the spirit of the Greek tragedians, and of the validity of many things which have been supposed to be essential properties, we find an associate in Voltaire. But in many other points he has, without examination, nay even unconsciously, adopted the maxims of his predecessors, and followed their practice. In opinions founded perhaps more on national peculiarities than on human nature and the essence of tragic poetry in general, he is equally implicated with them. On this account we may include him along with them in the common examination; we are not speaking of the execution of particular parts, but of the general principles of tragic art, which we are to collect from the shape of the works.

The consideration of the regularity insisted on brings us back to what are called the three unities of Aristotle. We shall examine the doctrine delivered by the Greek philosopher on this subject; how far these rules were known to or observed by the Greek tragedians; whether the French poets have in reality overcome the difficulty of observing them without constraint and improbability, or merely escaped from it with dexterity; and finally, whether the merit of this observance is actually so great and essential as it has been deemed, and whether on the other hand more essential beauties must not be sacrificed for the sake of complying with it.

We may view the French tragedy under another aspect, in which it does not rest on the authority of the ancients: this is the union of poetry, with a number of social observances founded only on consent. On the subject in question the French are far less clear than on that of the rules; for nations are usually not more capable of knowing and appreciating themselves than individuals. It is intimately connected with the spirit of French poetry in general, nay with their whole literature and the very language itself. All this has in France been formed under the guardianship of society, and has uniformly been guided and determined by it, a society which zealously imitated the tone of the capital, and this again took its direction from the modes of a brilliant court. If such is really the case, as there can indeed be no difficulty in proving, we may easily conceive why the French

literature, since the age of Louis XIV., has been and still is so well received in the upper ranks of society, in the fashionable world, throughout all Europe, while the body of the people, everywhere true to their own manners, have never shown anything like a cordial liking to it. In this way, even in foreign countries, it finds again in some measure the place of its birth.

The far famed three unities, which have given rise to a whole Iliad of critical wars, are the *unities of action, time, and place.*

The validity of the first is universally allowed, but the difficulty is to agree about its signification; and here I may venture to observe that it is no easy matter to come to an understanding on the subject.

The unities of place and time are considered by some as merely a secondary concern, while others give the utmost importance to them, and affirm that without them there can be no salvation for the dramatic poet. In France this zeal is not confined to the learned world, but seems to be a common concern of the nation. Every Frenchman, who has sucked in Boileau with his mother's milk, considers himself as much a natural born champion of the dramatic unities, as the kings of England since the time of Henry VIII. are hereditary *Defenders of the faith.*

It is amusing enough to see the name of Aristotle borrowed to sanction these three unities, while the only one of which he speaks with any degree of fulness is the first, the unity of action. With respect to the unity of time he merely throws out an indefinite hint, and as to the unity of place he does not even say a single syllable on the subject.

I am not therefore in a polemical relation with Aristotle, for I do not in any wise dispute the unity of action when properly understood; I only consider a greater latitude with respect to place and time as defensible in many species of the drama, nay as even essential to them. But I must first say a few words respecting the Poetics of Aristotle, which, though consisting but of a few pages, have given rise to many voluminous commentaries, that we may place ourselves in the proper point of view.

It is well known that this treatise is a mere fragment, and that many important subjects are in no degree touched upon in it. Several learned men have even been of opinion that it is not a fragment of the true original, but of an extract which some person made for his own improvement. All philological critics are however unanimous in the opinion that the text is very much falsified and corrupted, and they have endeavoured to restore it by their conjectural emendations. Its great obscurity is either expressly lamented by the commentators or confirmed by the

fact, that they all reject the interpretations of their predecessors, while they cannot make their own palatable to those who follow them.

It is very different with the rhetoric of Aristotle. This last work is undoubtedly genuine, perfect, and easily understood. How does he consider the oratorical art in it? As the sister of logic, which must produce persuasion by a method somewhat similar to that employed in operating conviction by logical deductions. This is nearly the same thing as if we were to consider architecture merely as the art of building with solidity and convenience. These are certainly the first requisites, but a great deal more is still necessary before we can consider it as one of the fine arts. We expect that architecture should unite these essential objects of an edifice with beauty of plan, and harmony of proportion, and that the whole should produce a corresponding impression. When we see that Aristotle included only in oratory what is addressed to the understanding, and what is subservient to an external aim without making any allowance for imagination or feeling, are we to be astonished that he was still less thoroughly acquainted with the secret of poetry, that art which is absolved from every aim but the unconditional one of creating the beautiful by means of free invention and clothing it in suitable language?—I have already had the hardihood to maintain this heresy, and hitherto I have seen no reason for retracting my opinion. Lessing thought otherwise. But what if Lessing, with his acute and dissecting criticism, split exactly on the same rock? This species of criticism is completely victorious when it exposes what cannot be admitted by the understanding in works which the understanding has alone produced; but it will hardly be sufficient to rise to the idea of a creation of art conceived in the true spirit of genius.

The philosophical theory of all the fine arts was in general but little cultivated among the ancients as a separate science; of technical works on each separate art, in which the means of execution were alone considered, they had an ample sufficiency. Were I to select a guide from among the ancient philosophers, it should undoubtedly be Plato, who acquired the idea of the beautiful not by dissection, which never can give it, but by contemplative inspiration, and in whose works the germs of a genuine philosophy of art, are everywhere scattered.

Let us now hear what Aristotle says, respecting the unity of action.

"We assume that tragedy is the imitation of a perfect and entire action which has a certain magnitude: for there may be a whole without any magnitude whatever. A whole is what has

a beginning, a middle, and end. The beginning is what is not necessarily after another thing, but that which from its nature has something after it, or arising out of it. The end on the other hand is what in its nature is after something else, either necessarily, or usually, but after which there is nothing. The middle, what is itself after another thing, and after which there is something. Hence poems which are properly composed ought neither to begin nor to end accidentally, but according to the principles above laid down."

Strictly speaking, it is a contradiction to say that a whole, which must have parts, can be without magnitude. But Aristotle immediately states in explanation, that he means by magnitude

- what is essential to beauty, a certain measure which is neither so
- small as not to allow us to distinguish its parts, nor so extensive
- as to prevent us from taking the whole in at one view. This is therefore merely an external definition of the beautiful derived from experience, and founded on the quality of our organs of sense and our powers of comprehension. However, his application of it to the drama is singular enough. "It must have an extension, but such as may easily be taken in by the memory. The determination of the length according to the wants of the representation, does not belong to the art. With respect to the essence of the thing, the composition will be the more beautiful the more it is extended without prejudice to its comprehensibility." This opinion would be highly favourable for the compositions of Shakspeare and other romantic poets, who have included a much more extensive circle of life, character, and events, in one picture, than is to be found in the simple Greek tragedy, if we could only show that they have given it the necessary unity, and such a magnitude as can be clearly taken in at a view, and this we can have no hesitation in affirming to have been actually done by them.

In another place Aristotle requires the same unity of action from the epic poets, as from the dramatic; he repeats the above definitions, and says that the poet must not resemble the historian, who relates contemporary events, although they have had no influence on one another. Here we have still a more definite demand of connexion between the events represented as causes and effects, than that which was before stated in his explanation of the parts of a whole. He owns however that the epic poet may take in a much greater number of events connected with one main action, as the narrative form enables him to describe several actions going on at the same time; on the other hand the dramatic poet cannot represent many things at the same time, but merely what is going on upon the stage, and the part which the persons who appear there take in one action. But what if the

dramatic poet should find means, from a different constitution of the scene, and a more perfect theatrical perspective, to develop in a due manner and without confusion, although in a more limited space, a fable not inferior in extent to the epic poem? Where would be the objection, if the only obstacle was the supposed impossibility?

This is nearly all which is contained in the Poetics of Aristotle on the subject of unity of action. A short investigation will serve to show how very much these anatomical ideas, which have been stamped as rules, are below the essential requisites of poetry?

Unity of action is expected. What is action? This is generally got rid of, as if it was altogether self-evident. In the higher proper signification, action is an activity dependent on the will of man. Its unity will consist in the direction towards one sole aim; and to its completion belongs all that lies between the first determination, and the execution of the deed.

This idea of action is applicable to many of the tragedies of the ancients; for instance, the murder of his mother by Orestes, the determination of Œdipus to discover and punish the murderer of Laius: it is not however applicable to all of them; still less is it applicable to the greater part of modern tragedies, at least if we seek the action in the principal characters. What happens through them, and proceeds from them, has frequently no more connexion with a voluntary determination, than the shipwreck of a vessel on a rock in a storm. But even in the sense of the ancients we must include in the action the determination to bear the consequences of the deed with heroic resolution, and the execution of this determination will belong to its completion. The pious determination of Antigone to perform the last duties to her unburied brother is soon executed without much difficulty; but its claims to become the object of a tragedy rest in her suffering death for it without repentance, and without showing any symptoms of weakness. And to take an example from another sphere, is not Shakespeare's Julius Cæsar, with respect to action, constructed on the same principle? Brutus is the hero of the piece: the completion of his great determination does not consist in the mere assassination of Cæsar (an action ambiguous in itself, and of which the motives might have been ambition and jealousy), but in this, that he proves himself the genuine champion of Roman liberty, by the ready indifference with which he sacrifices his amiable life for that object.

Farther, there could be no knot in the piece without opposition, and this generally arises out of the contradictory motives and views of the different persons. When we limit therefore the idea of an action to the determination and the deed, we shall then have for the most part two or three actions in one tragedy. Which of

them is the principal action? Every person thinks his own the most important, for every man is his own central point. The determination of Creon to maintain his royal dignity, by punishing with death the person who intercedes Polynices, is equally fixed with the determination of Antigone, equally important as we see at the end, and not less dangerous, as it draws along with it the destruction of the whole house of Creon. It may be perhaps said that the negative determination is merely to be considered as the completion of the affirmative. But what if each determines on something not exactly opposite, but altogether different? In the *Andromache* of Racine, Orestes wishes to prevail on Hermione to return his love; Hermione is resolved either to compel Pyrrhus to marry her, or to be revenged on him; Pyrrhus wishes to get rid of Hermione, and to be united to Andromache; Andromache is desirous of saving her son, and at the same time remaining true to the memory of her husband. Yet nobody ever refused to allow the unity of this piece, as the whole has a common connexion, and ends with one common catastrophe. But which of the actions of the four persons is the main action? In strength of passion their endeavours are pretty nearly equal to one another, in all of them the whole happiness of life is at stake; the action of Andromache has however the advantage of moral dignity, and Racine was therefore perfectly right in naming the piece after her.

We see here a new definition in the conception of action, namely, the reference to the idea of moral liberty, by which alone man is considered as the first author of his determination. For, considered within the province of experience, the determination as beginning of the action is not merely cause, but is again the effect of preceding motives. We have, in this reference to a higher idea, sought the *unity* and *integrity* of tragedy in the sense of the ancients; namely, its absolute beginning is the proof of liberty, and its absolute end the acknowledgment of necessity. We consider ourselves justified in affirming that Aristotle was altogether a stranger to this view: he never speaks of the idea of fate as essential to tragedy. We must not in general expect from him a strict idea of action, as determination and deed. He says somewhere: "The extent of a tragedy is always sufficiently great, if, by a series of probable or necessary consequences, a change from infelicity to felicity, or from felicity to infelicity, can be brought about." Hence it is evident that he understands by *action*, like the whole of the moderns, merely something that takes place. According to him, this action must have beginning, middle, and end, and consequently consist of a plurality of events connected with one another. But where are the limits of this plurality? Is not the concatenation of causes and effects, backwards and for-

wards, without end; and consequently should we not begin and break off everywhere in the same arbitrary manner? In this way, can there be either beginning or end, corresponding to the very accurate definition of Aristotle? Completion would therefore be altogether impossible. If however nothing more is required in the unity of the plurality of events than casual connexion, then the rule is indefinite in the extreme, and the unity may be narrowed or enlarged at pleasure. For every series of events or actions, which are occasioned by one another, whatever its extent, may always be comprehended under a single point of view, and denoted by a single name. When Calderon, in one drama describes the conversion of Peru to Christianity, from the very beginning, that is, the discovery of the country, to the completion, and when nothing actually appears in his piece which had not an influence on that conversion; is not this as much an exemplification of unity in the above sense, as the most simple Grecian tragedy, which however the champions of the rules of Aristotle will never be induced to allow?

• Corneille was well aware of the difficulty of a proper definition of unity in an inevitable plurality of subordinate actions, and endeavoured in this way to get rid of it. "I assume," says he, "that the unity of action consists, in comedy, in the unity of the intrigue, or the obstacle to the views of the principal persons: and in tragedy, in the unity of the danger, whether the hero sinks under or extricates himself from it. I will not however affirm that several dangers in tragedy, and several intrigues or obstacles in comedy may not be allowable, when they are necessarily connected with one another; for then the escape from the first danger does not make the action complete, because it draws a second after it, and the clearing up of one intrigue does not place the acting persons at their ease, because it involves them in another."

In the first place the difference here assumed between tragic and comic unity is altogether unessential. For the nature of the connexion is not influenced by the circumstance, that the events in tragedy are more serious, and attended with great danger; the embarrassment of the characters in comedy when they cannot accomplish their views, their intrigue, may equally receive the appellation of danger. Corneille, like most others, refers all to the idea of connexion between cause and effect. No doubt when the principal persons, either from marriage or death, are placed in a state of tranquillity, the drama comes to a close; but if nothing more is necessary to its unity than the uninterrupted progress of a collision, which serves to keep up a dramatic movement, simplicity will then be found to come but poorly off: without violating this rule of unity, we may go on to an almost endless accu-

mulation of events, as in the *Thousand and One Nights*, where the thread of the story is never once broken.

✓ *De la Motte*, a French author, who wrote against the whole of the unities, wishes, in the place of unity of action, to substitute the words, *unity of interest*. If the expression is not confined to the interest in the fate of a single person, but is used to signify in general the direction of the mind during the aspect of an event, I should then consider it, so understood, as the most satisfactory and the nearest to the truth.

• But we should derive but little advantage from groping about empirically with the commentators on Aristotle. The idea of *one* and of *whole* is in no manner derived from experience, but arises out of the original free-activity of our mind. To account for the manner in which we in general arrive at this idea, and think of one and a whole, nothing is less requisite than a system of metaphysics.

✓ The external sense perceives only in objects an indefinite plurality of distinguishable parts; the judgment, by which we comprehend these parts in one entire and perfect unity, is always founded on the reference to a higher sphere of ideas. Thus, for example, the mechanical unity of a watch consists in the aim of measuring time; this aim however is only obvious to the understanding, and can neither be seen by the eyes, nor laid hold of by the hands: the organical unity of a plant and an animal consists in the idea of life; and the inward contemplation of life, which is itself uncorporeal, although it appears through the medium of the corporeal world, is brought by us to the individual living object, otherwise we could not obtain it through that object.

✓ The separate parts of a work of art, and consequently, returning immediately to the question before us, the separate parts of a tragedy, must not be received by the eye and ear alone, but be taken in by the understanding. They are all subservient to one common aim, namely, to produce a joint impression on the mind. The unity consists therefore as in the above examples, but in a higher sphere, in the feeling or in the reference to ideas. This is the same thing; for the feeling, in so far as it is not merely sensual and passive, is our sense, our organ for the infinite, which forms us for ideas.

✓ Far from rejecting therefore the law of a perfect unity in tragedy as unnecessary, I require a unity which lies much deeper, is much more fervent, and more mysterious than that with which most critics are satisfied. I find this unity in the tragical compositions of Shakspeare, in as great perfection as in those of Æschylus and Sophocles; while on the contrary, I do not find

it in many of those tragedies extolled as correct by the critics of the dissecting school.

I hold the logical coherence, the casual connexion, as equally essential to tragedy and every serious drama, for this reason, that all the mental powers influence one another, and that when the understanding is compelled to make a leap, the imagination and feeling of the composition no longer follow with the same alacrity; but then the champions of what is called regularity have applied this prescription with a degree of petty subtlety, which can have no other effect than that of impeding the poet, and rendering it impossible for him to produce works of genuine excellence.

Do not let us suppose that the order of sequence in a tragedy resembles a slender thread, which we are every moment in anxious dread of snapping (on account of the admitted inevitable plurality of subordinate actions and interests, this simile is by no means correctly applicable;) but rather let us suppose it a mighty stream, which overcomes many obstacles in its raging course, and at last loses itself in the repose of the ocean. It springs perhaps from different fountains, and it certainly receives other rivers, which hasten towards it from opposite points of the compass. Why should not the poet be allowed to conduct various independent streams of human passions and endeavours, separately from each other, for a time, till the moment of their raging junction, if he can place the spectator on an eminence from whence he may overlook the whole of their course? And if this great collection of waters should again divide into several branches, and pour itself into the sea by several mouths, is it not still the same stream?

So much for the unity of action. With respect to the unity of place, we find only the following passage in Aristotle: "Moreover the epic poem is distinguished from tragedy by its length: for the latter seeks as far as possible to circumscribe itself within one revolution of the sun, or to exceed this very little; but the epic poem is unlimited in point of time, and in that respect different from tragedy. At first however this was managed in the same manner in tragedies and epic poems."

We may in the first place observe that here Aristotle gives no precept, but merely makes historical mention of a peculiarity, which he observed in the Grecian examples before him. But what if the Greek tragedians had particular reasons for circumscribing themselves within this extent of time, which with the constitution of our theatres would no longer have existed? We shall immediately see that this was actually the case.

Corneille with great justice finds this rule extremely inconve-

nient, and prefers therefore the easiest interpretation. He says he should, without hesitation, extend the duration of the action even to thirty hours. Others however stoutly insist on the action occupying no longer a period than that of its representation, that is from two to three hours.—The dramatic poet must, according to them, be punctual to his hour. In the main, the latter manage their cause better than the more lenient critics. For the only foundation for the rule is the observation of a probability which is by them supposed to be necessary for illusion, namely, that the actual time and that of the representation should be the same. If we once admit a difference between them, such as that from two to thirty hours, we may upon the same principle go still a great way farther. This idea of illusion has occasioned great errors in the theory of art. To it we are to attribute the general mistake of supposing that the subject represented is confounded with reality. In that case the terrors of tragedy would be a true torture to us, an incubus of the fancy. No, the theatrical as well as every other poetical illusion, is a waking dream, to which we voluntarily resign ourselves. To produce it, the poet and actors must agitate the minds in a powerful manner, and the probabilities of calculation do not contribute in the smallest degree towards it. This demand of literal deception, pushed to the extreme, would exclude every poetic form; for we know very well that the mythological and historical persons did not speak our language, that impassioned pain does not express itself in verse, &c. What sort of unpoetical spectator would he be who, instead of following the incidents with his participation, should like a gaoler, with his watch or his hour-glass in his hand, count out to the heroes of the tragedy the minutes which they still have to act and live! Is our soul then a piece of clock-work, that tells the hours and minutes with infallible accuracy? Has it not rather a very different measure of time for the conditions of entertainment and wearisomeness? In the one case, how rapidly the hours fly under an easy and varied activity; in the other, in which we feel all our mental powers clogged and impeded, they are stretched out to an immeasurable length. Thus it is during the present; but it is completely the reverse in recollection: the interval of dead and dull uniformity disappears in a moment; while that which marks an overflow of varied impressions increases in the same proportion. Our body is subjected to external astronomical time, because the organical operations are regulated by it; but our mind has its own ideal time, which is nothing but the consciousness of the progressive developement of our existence. In this kind of chronometer the intervals of an indifferent inactivity pass for nothing, and two important mo-

ments, though separated by intervening years, are immediately linked to one another. Hence it is usual with us, when intensely occupied with any object previous to falling asleep, to take up the very same train of thought immediately on our awaking, and the intervening dreams vanish into their unessential obscurity. It is the very same with dramatic composition: our imagination overleaps with ease the times which are presupposed and indicated, but which are omitted because nothing important takes place in them; it dwells solely on the decisive moments placed before it, by the compression of which the poet gives wings to the lazy course of days and hours.

But it will be urged that the ancient tragedians observed the unity of time. This expression is by no means correct; it should at least be the identity of the time of the representation with the actual time. And even then it does not apply to the ancients: what they observe is nothing but the apparent continuity of time. It is of importance to attend to this distinction of *apparent*; for they unquestionably allow, during the choral songs, a much greater number of events to take place than could actually happen within such a period of time. In the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus the whole interval, from the destruction of Troy to his arrival in Mycenæ, is included, which must have consisted of a very considerable number of days; in the *Trachiniae* of Sophocles, during the course of the piece, the voyage from Thessaly to Eubœa is thrice performed; in the *Supplices* of Euripides, during a single choral ode, an *entire* expedition from Athens against Thebes takes place, a battle is fought, and the general returns victorious. So far were the Greeks from this sort of minute and painful calculation. They had however a particular reason for observing the apparent continuity of time in the constant presence of the chorus. When the chorus leaves the stage, the constant progress is then interrupted, of which we have a very striking instance in the *Eumenides* of Æschylus, where the whole interval is omitted, which was necessary to allow Orestes to proceed from Delphi to Athens. Moreover, between the three pieces of a trilogy, which were consecutively represented, and which constituted a whole, there were as considerable intervals as those between the three acts of many a Spanish drama.

The moderns have, from their division into acts, which was, properly speaking, unknown to the Greek tragedy, a convenient means of extending the period of representation without impropriety. For the poet may easily presume so far on the imagination of the spectator, as to suppose that he will during the interruption of the whole representation, imagine the lapse of a



much longer interval than that which is filled up by the actual time of the music which is performed between the acts; otherwise he might be invited to come again the next day for the following act, to make it appear the more natural to him. The division into acts had its origin with the new comedy, when the chorus was excluded. Horace prescribes that a play shall neither have more nor fewer than five acts. The rule is so essential that Wieland was of opinion Horace was here laughing at the young Pisos in urging the importance of an observance like this with such solemnity of tone. If in the ancient tragedy we are to suppose the conclusion of an act wherever the stage remains empty, and the chorus alone proceeds with dancing and song, we shall often have fewer than five acts, but often also more than five. As an observation that, in a representation of between two and three hours, so many resting points are necessary for the attention, it may be allowed to pass; but I should be anxious to hear any reason derived from the nature of dramatic poetry, why a drama must have so many and only so many divisions. But the world is governed by custom and tradition: attempts to diminish the number of acts have been favourably received; but it is still considered as a most dangerous and unhallowed innovation to exceed the consecrated number of five.*

The division into acts seems to me erroneous, when nothing takes place in the intervals, as is so often the case in modern pieces, and when we perceive the persons at the beginning of the new act in exactly the same situation as at the close of the foregoing. And yet this standing still has given much less offence than the adoption of a considerable interval, or the representation of extravagant incidents, because the former is merely a negative error.

The romantic poets take the liberty of changing the scene, even during the course of an act. As the stage is always previously empty, these are interruptions of the continuity, which justify them in the adoption of so many intervals. If we stumble at this, but admit the propriety of a division into acts, we have only to consider these changes of scene in the light of a greater number of short acts. It will perhaps be argued, this is justifying one error by another, the violation of the unity of time by the violation of the unity of place: we shall therefore proceed to point out at more length the insufficiency of the last mentioned rule.

In vain, as we have already said, shall we seek for any opinion in Aristotle on the subject. It is asserted that the rule was ob-

* Three unities, five acts: why not seven persons? These rules seem to proceed according to odd numbers.

served by the ancients. Not always, only generally. Of seven pieces of *Æschylus*, and the same number of *Sophocles*, there are two, the *Eumenides* and *Ajax*, in which the scene is changed. That they generally retain the same scene follows naturally from the constant presence of the chorus, which must be got rid of in a suitable manner before a change can take place. But then we have to consider that their scene represented a much wider extent than ours in most cases; not a mere room, but the open space before several buildings: and the disclosing the interior of a house by means of the *encyclema*, may be considered in the same light as the drawing a back curtain on our stage.

The objection to the change of scene is also founded on the erroneous idea of illusion which we have already attempted to refute. We must not transfer the action to another place, lest the illusion should be dispelled. But even allowing that we are in reality to consider the place represented as the actual place, in this case the decoration of our scene ought to be altogether different from what it now is.* Johnson, a critic, in general an advocate for strict rules, very judiciously observes, that if our imagination once goes so far as to transport us eighteen hundred years back to Alexandria, and allows us to suppose the story of Antony and Cleopatra to be taking place before us, the second step of transporting ourselves from Alexandria to Rome, is much more easy. The capability of our mind to fly in thought through the immensity of time and space with the rapidity of lightning is well known and acknowledged in real life; and shall poetry, the object of which is to add all manner of wings to our imagination, and which has at command all the magic of genuine illusion, that is, of animated and overpowering fiction, be alone obliged to renounce this general prerogative of our species?

Voltaire wishes to derive the unity of place and time from the unity of action, but his conclusions are superficial in the extreme. "For the same reason," says he, "the unity of place is essential, because one action cannot go on in several places at the same time." But we have already seen that several persons necessarily take a part in one principal action, that it consists of a plurality of subordinate actions, and why should not these go on in different places? Is not the same war frequently carried on in Europe and India at the same time, and must not the historian equally recount the events which take place on both these scenes?

* It is merely calculated for a single point of view: seen from every other place, the broken lines betray the imperfection of the imitation. So little attention do the audience in general pay to these niceties, that they are not even shocked when the actors enter and disappear through a wall without a door between the side scenes.

"The unity of time," he adds, "is naturally connected with the two first. When the poet represents to me a conspiracy, and the action includes fourteen days, he must account to me for all that has taken place in these fourteen days." Yes, for all that belongs to the business; the rest which lies between, he passes over in silence, like every good story-teller, and no person ever thinks of the omission. "When he therefore places before me the events of fourteen days, this gives me at least fourteen different actions, however small they may be." No doubt, if the poet were to be so unskilful as to wind off the fourteen days one after another with visible precision, if we should see this exact number of revolutions of days and night, and if the characters were so many times to rise and go to bed. But he thrusts the periods, during which the action is imperceptible in its progress, into the back ground, annihilates in the composition the intervals during which it stands absolutely still, and contrives with a rapid pencil to give something like an accurate idea of the time which we must suppose to have elapsed between the divisions. Why is the privilege of adopting a much wider space between the two extremes of the piece than that of the actual duration of the representation, of importance, and even indispensable to many subjects? The example of conspiracy given by Voltaire comes here very opportunely.

A conspiracy contrived and executed in two hours is, in the first place, not credible. Moreover, it is ethically, that is, with reference to the characters of the persons of the piece, very different from the idea of a conspiracy where the determination, however dangerous, must be preserved in and concealed for a considerable time. Although the poet does not exhibit this lapse of time immediately in the work, he allows us however to perceive it perspectively as in a glass, in the minds of the characters.

In this kind of perspective Shakspeare is the greatest master whom I know: a single word frequently reveals an almost interminable series of preceding states of mind. The poet, confined within the narrow limits of time, will in many subjects be forced to mutilate the action, while he must begin quite close to the last determination, or be under the necessity of hurrying on its progress in a most unsuitable manner: on each supposition he must diminish the grand picture of a strong purpose, not a momentary effervescence, but a firm resolution maintained undauntedly, amidst every change of external circumstances, till the time is ripe for execution. It will no longer be what Shakspeare has so often painted, and what he has described in the following lines:

Between the acting of a dreadful thing,
 And the first motion, all the interim is
 Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream:
 The genius, and the mortal instruments,
 Are then in council; and the state of man,
 Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
 The nature of an insurrection.

But why are the Greek and romantic poets so different in their practice with respect to place and time? The spirit of our criticism will not allow us to follow the practice of many critics, who in a summary manner pronounce the latter barbarians. We conceive on the contrary that they lived in very cultivated times, and were themselves highly cultivated. The state of the ancient stage, as we have already said, led naturally to the apparent continuity of time and the immutability of the scene, and the observation of this custom was also favoured by the nature of the materials on which the Grecian dramatists had to work. These materials were mythology, and consequently they were already formed into fables; for the former poetic compositions had collected together, and united in constant and distinct masses, what in reality is detached and scattered about in every possible manner. Moreover, the heroic age which they painted was at once extremely simple in manners, and pregnant with wonderful events; and hence everything of itself went straight forward towards the aim of a tragical determination.

But still the principal cause of the difference is the plastic spirit of the antique, and the picturesque spirit of the romantic poetry. Sculpture directs our attention exclusively to the group exhibited to us, it disentangles it as far as possible from all external accompaniments, and where they cannot be altogether dispensed with, they are indicated as lightly as possible. Painting, on the other hand, delights in exhibiting, in a minute manner, along with the principal figures, the surrounding locality and all the secondary objects, and to open to us in the back ground a prospect into a boundless distance: light and perspective are its peculiar charms. Hence the dramatic, and especially the tragic art of the ancients annihilates in some measure the external circumstances of space and time; while the romantic drama adorns by their changes its more diversified pictures. Or to express myself in other terms, the principle of the antique poetry is ideal, that of the romantic mystical: the former subjects space and time to the internal free-activity of the mind; the latter adores these inconceivable essences as supernatural powers, in whom something of the divinity has its abode.

I come now to the influence which the above rules of unity,

strictly interpreted and received as inviolable, along with other conventional rules, have had on the shape of French tragedy.

With a state of the stage altogether different, with materials for the most part dissimilar, and handled in an opposite spirit, they were still desirous of retaining the rules of the ancient tragedy, in so far as they knew them from Aristotle.

- They prescribed the same simplicity of action as in the Grecian tragedy, and yet they left out the lyrical part, which is a protracted development of the moment, and consequently a pause in the action. This part could not indeed be retained, as we no longer possess the ancient music, which was subservient to the poetry instead of governing it like ours. When we deduct from the Greek tragedies the choral odes, and the lyrical pieces which are often put into the mouths of individuals, they are nearly one half shorter than a common French tragedy. Voltaire complains frequently in his prefaces of the great difficulty of procuring materials for five long acts. How are the gaps arising from the leaving out of the lyrical parts now filled up? By intrigue. With the Greeks the action, which is calculated for a few great moments, rolls on without interruption to its determination; but instead of this the French have been obliged to introduce secondary characters, whose opposite views may give rise to a multitude of impending incidents, that our attention, or rather our curiosity, may be kept up to the close. Everything like simplicity was now therefore at an end; but they flattered themselves that they had preserved a unity for the understanding, by means of an artificial intrigue.

Intrigue is not a tragical motive in itself; it is essential to the new comedy, as we have already shown. Comedy must often be satisfied with an obreptitious resting-place for the understanding, but this is by no means the poetical side of this demi-prosaic species of drama. Although the French tragedy endeavours in particular parts to rise as high as possible above comedy, by means of seriousness, dignity and pathos, it still, in my opinion, in its general structure and composition, bears but too much affinity to it. In many French tragedies I find only a unity for the understanding, while the feeling remains unsatisfied. From the complication of painful and violent situations we come at last, it is true, happily or unhappily, to a state of repose; but in the course of affairs exhibited to us there is no secret and mysterious revelation of a higher order of things; we find no allusion to the consolatory idea of heaven, in the display of the dignity of human nature, either in its conflicts with fate or with an over-ruling providence. To such a tranquillization of feeling poetical justice is partly unnecessary, and partly also, from the very ambiguous

and imperfect manner in which it is usually exercised, very far from sufficient. But even poetical justice (which I cannot help considering as an exemplification of a doctrine false in itself, and of which the aim is not the excitation of truly moral feelings) has not unfrequently been altogether neglected by the French tragedians.

The use of intrigue is certainly well calculated to effect the short duration of an important action. For whoever carries on intrigues is expeditious, and loses no time in attaining his object. But the violent course of human destinies proceeds with measured step, like the change of seasons: great designs ripen slowly; the dark suggestions of deadly fraud are shy and dilatory in leaving the abysses of the mind for the light of day; and, as Horace with equal truth and beauty observes, the flying criminal is only limpingly followed by penal retaliation.* Let any one attempt, for instance, to circumscribe the gigantic picture of Macbeth's murder, his tyrannical usurpation, and final fall, within the narrow limits of the unity of time, and he will then see, that, however many of the events which Shakspeare successively exhibits before us in such dread array, he may have placed anterior to the commencement of the piece, and made the subject of after recital, he has altogether deprived it of its sublimity of import. This drama, it is true, comprehends a considerable period of time: but in the rapidity of its progress have we leisure to calculate this? We see, as it were, the fates weaving their dark web on the bosom of time; and the storm and whirlwind of events, which impel the hero to the first daring attempt, which afterwards lead him to commit innumerable crimes to secure the fruits of it, and drive him at last, amidst numerous perils, to his destruction in the heroic combat, draws us irresistibly along with them. Such a tragical exhibition resembles the course of a comet, which, hardly visible at first, and only important to the astro-nomic eye, when appearing in the heaven in a nebulous distance, soon soars with an unheard of and perpetually increasing rapidity towards the central point of our system, spreading dismay among the nations of the earth, till in a moment, with its portentous tail, it overspreads half of the firmament with a flaming fire.

* *Raro antecedentem scelestum
Deseruit pede pæna claudo.*

TRANS.

LECTURE X.

The same subject continued.—Influence of these rules on French tragedy.—Manner of treating mythological and historical materials.—Idea of tragical dignity.—Observations of conventional rules.—False system of expositions.—Use at first made of the Spanish theatre.—General character of Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire.—Review of their most important works.—Thomas Corneille, and Crebillon.

THE French poets, for the sake of the unity of time to which they are subjected, must renounce all those effects which proceed from the gradually accelerated growth of any object in the mind, or in the external world, through the course of time. The unity of time, with their wretched decoration of the stage, deprived them in a great measure of whatever in a drama is calculated to fascinate the eye. Accidental circumstances might recommend a more close observance of this rule, or render it even indispensable. From an observation of Corneille,* we are led to conjecture that machinery was at that time, in France, extremely clumsy and imperfect. It was moreover the general custom for a number of distinguished spectators to have seats on both sides of the stage itself, which hardly left a breadth of ten paces for the free movements of the actors. Regnard, in his *Distrait*, gives us an amusing description of the noise and confusion occasioned by the fashionable *petit maitres* who in his day occupied this privileged place, and who chattered and laughed behind the backs of the actors, disturbing the spectators, and drawing their attention from the play. This impropriety continued down to the time of Voltaire, who had the merit, after repeated endeavours, of at last obtaining its complete abolition, when *Semiramis* was brought out. How could they have ventured on a change of decoration in presence of such an unpoetical chorus as this, totally unconnected with the piece, and yet thrust into the very middle of the representation. In the *Cid*, the scene manifestly changes several times in the course of the same act, and yet it is never changed in the representation. In the English and Spanish plays of those times, this was also generally the case, but still certain signs were agreed on which served to denote the change of place,

* In his *Premier Discours sur la Poesie Dramatique* he says: "Une chanson a quelquefois bonne grace; et dans les pieces des machines cet ornement est redevenu necessaire pour remplir les oreilles du spectateur, pendant que les machines descendent."

and the pliant imagination of the spectators followed the poet whithersoever he chose. But in France, the young men of quality who sat on the stage lay in wait for opportunities of making laughable discoveries; and as all theatrical effect requires a certain distance, and appears ludicrous when too closely seen, everything was confined to the dialogue between a few characters, and the stage was subjected to all the formalities of an anti-chamber.

The scene, for the most part, actually represented an anti-chamber, or at least a hall in the interior of a palace. As the action of the Greek tragedies is always carried on in open places majestically surrounded, the French poets have given to their mythological materials, in so far as the scene is concerned, the manners of modern courts. In a princely palace no violence, no failure in social decency is allowed; and as in a tragedy affairs cannot always proceed with pure compliment, every act of a bolder description, every exercise of power, everything calculated to make a strong impression on the senses, is transacted behind the scenes, and merely related by confidants or other messengers. And yet Horace long ago remarked, that what is communicated to the ear excites the mind in a much feebler degree than what is exhibited to the eye, and what the spectator relates to himself. He only recommends that what is incredible and revoltingly cruel should be withdrawn from observation. The dramatic effect of the visible may, it is true, be very much abused; and it is possible for a theatre to degenerate into a noisy arena of mere bodily exhibitions, to which words and gestures may be, superfluous appendages. But the opposite extreme, of allowing no conviction to the eye, and always referring to something absent, is certainly equally undeserving of approbation. In many French tragedies the spectator might be led to entertain a feeling that great actions were actually taking place, but that he had made choice of a place which would not admit him to be an eye-witness of them. It is certain that the effect of a drama is very much impaired when the effects which we observe proceed from causes which are invisible and at a distance. The converse of this is preferable,—to show the cause itself, and merely to allow the effect to be recounted. Voltaire was aware of the injury which theatrical effect suffered from the established practice of the tragic stage in France; he frequently insists on richer scenical decorations; and he himself in his pieces, and others after his example, have ventured to represent many things to the eye, which before would have been considered as unsuitable or ridiculous. But notwithstanding this attempt, and the earlier one of Racine in *Athalie*, the eye is now more out of favour than ever with the fashionable critics. Wherever anything is to be seen, or any

action to be bodily executed, they scent a melodrama; and the idea that tragedy, if they were not incessantly to watch over its purity or rather its bald insipidity, might be gradually amalgamated with this species of play, (of which a word hereafter,) is a downright abomination to them.

Voltaire has indulged in various infractions of the unity of time, but still he has not dared directly to attack the rule itself as unessential. He merely wishes to see a greater latitude given to its interpretation. It is sufficient if the action takes place within the walls of a palace or a town, though in different parts of it. He wishes however, in order to avoid a change of decoration, that it should be so contrived, as at once to comprehend the various scenes. Here he betrays very confused ideas, both of architecture and perspective. He refers to the theatre of Palladio at Vicenza, which he could hardly have ever seen: for his account of this theatre, which, as we have already observed, is in itself only a misconception of the nature of the antique scene, appears to be altogether founded on descriptions which he did not understand. In his *Semiramis*, where he first attempted to carry his principles on this subject into practice, he has fallen into a singular error. Instead of allowing the persons to proceed to various places, he has made the places actually repair to the persons. The scene in the third act is a cabinet; this cabinet, in Voltaire's own words (before the queen leaves it,) gives way to a large hall splendidly ornamented. The Mausoleum of Ninus, which was at first in an open place before the palace, opposite to the temple of the Magi, has also found means to steal to the side of the throne in this hall. After giving out its ghost to the light of day, to the terror of many beholders, and again receiving it back, it repairs in the following act to its old place, where it probably had left its obelisks behind. In the fifth act we see that it is very spacious, and provided with subterraneous passages. What a noise the French critics would make, were any foreigner to commit such ridiculous blunders.*

* In *Brutus* we have another example of this running about of the scene with the persons. In front there is a spacious decoration: the Senate is assembled between the Capitoline temple and the house of Brutus, in the open air. Afterwards, on the rising of the assembly, Arons and Albin alone remain behind, and now it is said: *qui sont supposés être entrés de la salle d'audience dans un autre appartement de la maison de Brutus*. What is the poet's meaning here? Is the scene changed without being empty, or does he trust so far to the imagination of his spectators, as to suppose that, contrary to the evidence of their senses, they will take a scene for a chamber, which is ornamented in a style altogether different? And how does what in the first description is a public place become afterwards a hall of audience? This decoration is either conversant with legerdemain, or it has a bad memory.

We may in general observe with respect to the unity of place, that it is often very unsatisfactorily observed by the French poets, as well as by all who follow the same system of rules, even in comedy. The scene is not, it is true, changed, but things follow one another which do not usually happen in the same place. What can be more improbable than that people should confide their secrets to one another in the very place near which they know their enemies are? or that conspiracies should be hatched against a prince in his own anti-chamber? Great importance is attached to the circumstance of the stage never remaining empty in the course of an act. This is called binding the scenes. But the rule is frequently only observed in appearance, as the persons of the preceding scene go out at one door in the very moment when those of the next are entering at another. Moreover, they are not to enter or disappear without a motive distinctly announced: for the latter case particular pains are taken; the confidants are despatched on missions, and persons of equal rank are also expressly, however uncourteously, told to go out of the way. —With all these endeavours, the scene where everything takes place, is often so vaguely and contradictorily defined, that as a German writer* has well said, in many pieces we ought to insert under the list of the *dramatis personæ*: *The scene is on the theatre*.

These inconveniences arise almost inevitably from an anxious observance of the Greek rules, under a total change of circumstances. To avoid the supposed improbability of springing from one time and one place to another, they have often involved themselves in real and important improbabilities. A thousand times we have reason for repeating the observation of the Academy, in their criticism on the *Cid*, respecting the crowding together so many events in the period of twenty-four hours: "From the fear of sinning against the rules of art, the poet has rather chosen to sin against the rules of nature." But this imaginary contradiction between art and nature could only suggest itself to minds possessed of the lowest and most limited ideas with respect to art.

I come now to a more important point, namely, to that of the materials not being handled in a manner suitable to their nature and quality. The Greek tragedians, with a few exceptions, always selected objects from their native mythology. The French tragedians borrow theirs sometimes from the ancient mythology, but much more frequently from the history of almost all ages and nations, and their manner of treating mythological and his-

* Joh. Elias Schlegel, in his *Gedanken zur Aufnahme des Danischen Theaters*.

torical subjects is but too often not properly mythological, and not properly historical. I shall explain myself more distinctly. The poet who selects an ancient mythological fable, that is, a fable connected by sacred tradition with the religious belief of the Greeks, should enter himself, and in like manner enable his spectators to enter, into the spirit of antiquity; he should preserve the simple manners of the heroic ages, with which such violent passions and actions could alone be consistent or credible; his persons should bear that near resemblance to the gods which from their descent, and the frequency of their immediate intercourse with them, the ancients believed them to possess; what is wonderful in the Grecian religion should not be purposely avoided or under-stated, but placed in its true character before the imaginations of the spectators, who ought to be supposed capable of entering fully into the belief of it. Instead of this however the French poets have given to their mythological heroes and heroines the refinement of the fashionable world, and the court manners of the present day; they have, because those heroes were princes (shepherds of the people, Homer calls them,) given such descriptions of their situations and views as could only correspond with the calculating policy of a different age, and not merely set antiquarian learning at defiance, but also violated everything like characteristic costume. In *Phædra*, this princess is to be declared regent for her son till he come of age, after the supposed death of Theseus. How could this be compatible with the relations of the Grecian women of that day? It brings us down to the times of a Cleopatra. Hermione remains alone, without the protection of a brother or a father, at the court of Pyrrhus, nay even in his palace, and yet she is not married to him. With the ancients, and not merely in the Homeric age, marriage consisted in receiving the bride into the house of the bridegroom. But whatever justification there may be for the situation of Hermione in the practice of European courts, it is not the less repugnant to everything like female dignity, and the more indecorous, as Hermione is in love with the unwilling Pyrrhus, and urges the marriage in every possible way. What do we think the Greeks would have thought of this bold and indecent measure? No doubt it might appear equally offensive to French spectators, if Andromache were exhibited to them in the situation in which she appears in Euripides, where, as a captive, her person is enjoyed by the conqueror of her country. But when the way of thinking of two nations are so totally different, why will they torment themselves with attempts to fashion a subject founded on the manners of the one, to suit the manners of the other? What is allowed to remain will always exhibit a striking incon-

gruity with that which is new modelled, and to change the whole is either impossible, or in nowise preferable to a new invention. The Grecian tragedians certainly allowed themselves a great latitude in changing the circumstances of the fables, but the alterations were always consistent with the general ideas of the heroic age. On the other hand they always left the characters as they received them from tradition and early fable, by means of which the cunning of Ulysses, the wisdom of Nestor, and the impetuous rage of Achilles, had almost become proverbial. Horace particularly insists on the rule. But how unlike the Achilles in Racine's *Iphigenia* to the Achilles of Homer! The gallantry ascribed to him is not merely a sin against Homer, but it renders the whole story improbable. Are human sacrifices conceivable among a people whose chiefs and heroes are so susceptible of the most tender feelings? In vain recourse is had to the power of religious motives: history teaches us that a cruel religion becomes always milder with the manners of a people.

In these new exhibitions of ancient fables, the wonderful has been studiously rejected as foreign to our belief. But when we are once brought from a world in which it belonged to the order of things into a world entirely prosaical, and consistent with historical ideas, we then find any wonderful thing, which the poet can only exhibit in an insulated state, so much the more incredible. In Homer, and in the Greek tragedians, everything takes place in the presence of the gods, and when they are visible, or display themselves in any wonderful manner, we are in no manner astonished. On the other hand, all the labour and art of the modern poets, all the eloquence of their narratives, cannot reconcile our minds to these exhibitions. Examples are superfluous, the thing is so universally known. Yet I cannot help cursorily remarking how singularly Racine, cautious as he generally is, has on an occasion of this kind involved himself in an inconsistency. Respecting the origin of the fable of Theseus descending into the world below to carry off Proserpine for his friend Pirithôus, he adopts the historical explanation of Plutarch, that he was the prisoner of a Thracian king, whose wife he endeavoured to carry off from the same motive. On this he grounds the report of the death of Theseus, which was at first current. And yet he allows Phædra,* in a speech, to mention the fabulous tradition as an earlier achievement of the hero. How many women then did Theseus wish to carry off for Pirithôus? Pradon

* Je l'aime, non point tel que l'ont vu les enfers,
Volage adorateur de mille objets divers,
Qui va du dieu des morts deshonorar la couche.

manages this much better: when Theseus is asked by a confident if he really was in the world below, he answers, how could any sensible man possibly believe such a silly tale! he merely availed himself of the credulity of the people, and gave out this report from political motives.

So much with respect to the manner of handling mythological materials. The same objection is in the first place applicable in the case of the historical, namely, that the French manners of the day are substituted to those which properly belong to the different persons, and that the characters do not sufficiently bear the stamp of their age and their nation. But to this we must add another detrimental circumstance. A mythological subject is in its nature poetical, and ready for a new poetical attempt. In the French tragedy as in the Greek, an equal and constant dignity is required, and the French language is even much more fastidious in this respect, as very many things cannot be at all mentioned in poetry. But in history we are in a prosaical province, and the truth of the picture requires definitions, circumstances, and features, which cannot be given without a greater or less descent from the elevation of the tragical cothurnus. This has been done by Shakspeare the most perfect of all historical dramatists. The French tragedians however have not been able to bring their minds to submit to this, and hence their works are frequently deficient in those circumstances which give life and truth to a picture, and when an obstinate prosaical circumstance must at last be mentioned, they avail themselves of laboured and artificial circumlocutions.

Respecting the tragical dignity of historical subjects, peculiar principles have prevailed. Corneille was in the best way of the world when he brought his *Cid* on the stage, a story of the middle ages, which belonged to a kindred people, a story characterized by chivalrous love and honour, and in which the principal characters are not even of princely rank. Had this example been followed, a number of prejudices respecting tragical ceremony would of themselves have disappeared; tragedy, from its greater truth, from deriving its motives from a way of thinking still current and intelligible, would have been less foreign to the heart; the quality of the objects would of themselves have turned them from the stiff observation of the rules of the ancients, which they did not understand, as we see, for instance, that Corneille never deviated so far from these rules, as in this very piece, in the train, it is true, of his Spanish model; in one word, the French tragedy would have become national and truly romantic. But I know not what unfortunate star had the ascendant: notwithstanding the extraordinary success of his *Cid*, Corneille did not go one step

farther, and the attempt which he made had no imitators. In the time of Louis XIV. it was considered as a matter established beyond dispute, that the French, and in general the modern European history was not adapted for tragedy. They had recourse therefore to the ancient universal history: besides the Romans and Grecians, they frequently hunted about among the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Egyptians, for events, which, however obscure they might often be, they could dress out for the tragic stage. Racine made, according to his own confession, a hazardous attempt with the Turks; it was successful, and since that time, the necessary tragical dignity has been allowed to this barbarous people; with whom we often find the customs and habits of the rudest despotism, and the most abject slavery, united in the same person, and who know nothing of love, but the most luxurious sensuality; while it has been refused to the Europeans, notwithstanding their religion, their feeling of honour, and their respect for the female sex, plead so powerfully in their favour. But it was merely the modern, and more particularly the French names, which could not be tolerated as untragical and unpoetical; for the heroes of antiquity are with them Frenchmen in everything but the name; and antiquity was merely used as a thin veil under which the modern French character could be distinctly recognized. Racine's Alexander is certainly not the Alexander of history; but if under this name we imagine to ourselves the great Condé, the whole will appear tolerably natural. And who does not suppose Louis XIV. and the Duchess de la Valiere represented under Titus and Berenice? Did the poet wish to flatter his monarch by the allusion? Voltaire expresses himself somewhat strongly, when he says, that in the tragedies which succeeded those of Racine, we imagine that we are reading the romances of Mademoiselle Scuderi, which paint citizens of Paris under the names of heroes of antiquity. He alluded here more particularly to Crebillon. However much Corneille and Racine were tainted with the way of thinking of their own nation, they were still at times penetrated with the spirit of true objective exhibition. Corneille gives us a masterly picture of the Spaniards in the *Cid*; and this is conceivable enough, for he drew his materials from them. With the exception of the original sin of gallantry, he succeeded also pretty well with the Romans: of one part of their character at least he had a tolerable conception, their predominating patriotism, and unyielding pride of liberty, and the magnanimity of their political sentiments. All this, it is true, is nearly the same as we find it in Lucan, varnished over with a certain inflation and self-conscious pomp. The simple republican austerity, the humility of religion,

he could not attain. Racine has admirably painted the corrupt manners of the Romans under the Emperors, and the timid and dastardly manner in which the tyranny of Nero first began to display itself. It is true he had Tacitus for a predecessor, as he himself gratefully acknowledges; but still it is a great merit to translate history in such an able manner into poetry. He has also shown a just conception of the general spirit of Hebrew history: here he was guided by religious reverence, which the poet ought always in some degree to bring with him to his subject. He was less successful with the Turks: Bajazet makes love wholly in the European manner; the blood-thirsty policy of eastern despotism is very well portrayed, it is true, in the Vizier: but the whole resembles Turkey upside down, where the women, instead of being slaves, have contrived to get possession of the government, which wears such a revolting appearance, that we might well be inclined to infer from it, the Turks are really not so much to blame in keeping their women under lock and key. Neither has Voltaire, in my opinion, succeeded much better in his *Mahomet* and *Zaire*: the glowing colours of an oriental fancy are nowhere to be found. Voltaire has however this great merit, that he insisted on treating subjects with more historical truth, and that he made this the object of his own endeavours; and farther, that he again elevated to the dignity of the tragical stage the chivalrous and Christian characters of modern Europe, which since the time of the *Cid* had been altogether excluded from it. His *Lusignan* and *Nerestan* are among his most true, affecting, and noble creations; his *Tancrede*, although the invention as a whole is defective in strength, will always personally gain over every heart, like his namesake in Tasso. *Alzire* is highly distinguished in a historical point of view. It is singular enough that Voltaire, with his restless search after tragical materials, has actually completed the circumnavigation of the world: for as in *Alzire* he exhibits the American tribes of the other hemisphere, in his *Dschingiskan* he brings Chinese on the stage, from the farthest extremity of ours, who, from the faithful observation of their costume, have the appearance of comic or grotesque figures.

Unfortunately Voltaire came too late with his projected reformation of the theatre: much was already ruined by the trammels within which French tragedy had been so long confined; and the prejudice which gave such disproportionate importance to the observation of external rules and proprieties had, as it appears, been then irrevocably established.

Next to the rules respecting the external mechanism, which they had adopted without examination from the ancients, the prevailing ideas of social propriety peculiar to their nation were

the principal obstacles to the French poets in the exercise of their talents, and in many cases put it altogether out of their power to reach the highest tragical effect. The problem for the solution of the dramatic poet is the union of the poetical form with nature and truth, and consequently nothing ought to be included in the former, which the latter rejects. French tragedy, since the time of Richelieu, had developed itself under the favour and protection of the court; and even its scene had, as we have already observed, the appearance of an anti-chamber. In such an atmosphere the spectators might suggest the idea to the poet, that politeness was one of the original and essential ingredients of human nature. In tragedy, men are opposed to each other in the most dreadful strife, and in a close struggle with misfortune; we can only exact an ideal dignity from them, for from the nice observance of social punctilios they are absolved by their situation. So long as they still possess sufficient presence of mind not to violate them, so long as they do not appear completely overpowered by their grief and their mental agony, the highest degree of emotion cannot be reached. The poet may indeed be allowed to entertain that care for his persons which Cæsar had for himself after receiving the deadly blow, namely, to make them fall with decorum. He must not exhibit human nature to us in all its repulsive nakedness. The most heart-rending and dreadful pictures must still be possessed of beauty, must be somewhat more dignified than common reality. This miracle is effected by poetry: it has indescribable sighs, immediate sounds of the deepest pain, in which there is still something melodious. It is only a certain full-dressed and formal beauty, which is incompatible with the greatest truth of expression. And this beauty is exactly that which is demanded in the style of a French tragedy. No doubt there is something too in the quality of their language and their versification. The French language is altogether incapable of many bold flights, it has very little poetical freedom, and it carries into poetry all the grammatical stiffness of prose. Their poets have often acknowledged and lamented this. Besides, the Alexandrine with its couplets, with its hemistichs of equal length, is a very symmetrical and monotonous species of verse, and much better adapted for the expression of antithetical maxims, than for the musical delineation of passion with its unequal, abrupt, and erratic course. But the main cause lies in a national feature, in the social endeavour never to forget themselves in the presence of others, and always to exhibit themselves to the greatest possible advantage. It has been often remarked, that in French tragedy the poet is always too easily seen through the discourses of the different personages, that he com-

municates to them his presence of mind, his cool reflection on their situation, and his desire to shine upon all occasions. When we accurately examine the most of their tragical speeches, we shall find that they are seldom such as would be delivered by persons speaking or acting by themselves without any restraint; we shall generally discover something in them which betrays a reference more or less perceptible to the spectator. Before however our compassion can be powerfully excited, we must be familiar with the characters; but how is this possible, if we are always to see them yoked to their views and endeavours, or, what is worse, to an unnatural and assumed grandeur of character? We must overhear them in their unguarded moments, when they imagine themselves alone, and throw aside all care and precaution.

Eloquence may and ought to have a place in tragedy, but in so far as it appears with somewhat of an artificial method and preparation, it can only be in character when the speaker is sufficiently master of himself; for overpowering passion, an unconscious and involuntary eloquence is alone suitable. The truly inspired orator will forget himself in the object which occupies him. We call it rhetoric when he thinks more of himself, and the art in which he flatters himself he has obtained a mastery, than of his subject. Rhetoric, and rhetoric in a court dress, prevails but too much in many French tragedies, especially those of Corneille, instead of the suggestions of a noble, but simple and artless nature; Racine and Voltaire however have approximated much nearer to the true conception of a mind carried away by its sufferings. Whenever the tragic hero is able to express his pain in antitheses and ingenious allusions, we may safely dispense with our pity. This sort of conventional dignity is, as it were, a coat of mail, to prevent the blow from reaching the inward parts. On account of their retaining this festal pomp in situations where the most complete self-forgetfulness would be natural, Schiller has wittily enough compared the heroes in French tragedy to the kings in old copper-plates, who lie in bed with mantle, crown, and sceptre.

The social cultivation prevails throughout the whole of the French literature and art. Social cultivation sharpens the sense for the ludicrous, and on that account, when it is carried to an over refinement, it is the death of everything like enthusiasm. For all enthusiasm, all poetry, has a ludicrous aspect for the unfeeling. When therefore such a way of thinking has once become universal in a nation, a certain negative criticism will also arise. A thousand different things must be avoided, and in attending to these, the highest object of all is lost sight of, that

which ought properly to be performed. The dread of the ludicrous is the conscience of French poets; it has clipped their wings, and impaired their flight. It is exactly in the most serious kind of poetry that this dread must torment them the most; for extremes run into one another, and whenever pathos fails it gives rise to laughter and parody. It is amusing to witness the infinite distress of mind of Voltaire, when he was threatened with a parody of his *Semiramis* on the Italian theatre. In a petition to the Queen, this man, whose whole life had been passed in turning everything great and honourable into ridicule, endeavours to avail himself of his claim, as one of the servants of the King's household, to obtain a prohibition of a very allowable amusement of a higher description. As the French wits have indulged themselves in turning everything in the world into ridicule, and more especially the mental productions of other nations, they will also allow us on our parts to divert ourselves, when we see that their tragic writers, with all their care, have now and then been unable to escape the rock of which they were most in dread. Lessing has, with the most irresistible and victorious wit, pointed out the ludicrous nature of the very plans of *Rodogune*, *Semiramis*, *Merope*, and *Zaire*. But both in this respect and with regard to single laughable turns, a rich gleanings might yet be obtained.* But Lessing carried on a much more merciless war

* A few examples of the latter kind may be sufficient. The lines with which Theseus in the *Œdipus* of Corneille opens his part, are deserving of one of the first places.

Quelque ravage affreux qu'étale ici la peste
L'absence aux vrais amans est encore plus funeste.

The following from his *Otho* are equally well known:

Dis moi donc, lorsqu' Othon s'est offert à Camille,
A-t-il paru contraint? a-t-elle été facile?
Son hommage auprès d'elle a-t-il eu plein effet?
Comment l'a-t-elle pris, et comment l'a-t-il fait?

Where it is almost unconceivable, that the poet should not have seen the application which might be made of this passage, especially as he allows the confidant to answer: *J'ai tout vu*. That *Attila* should treat the kings who were dependent on him like good for nothing fellows:

Ils ne sont pas venus, nos deux rois; qu'on leur die
Qu'ils se font trop attendre, et qu'Attila s'ennuie
Qu'alors que je les mande ils doivent se hâter:

may in one view appear very serious and true, but nevertheless it appears exceedingly droll to us from the turn of expression, and especially from its being the opening of the piece. Generally speaking, with respect to the ludicrous, Corneille lived in a style of great innocence; the world since that time has become a great deal more witty. Hence when we make allowances for what he cannot be blamed for, as it merely arises from his language having become obso-

against the French stage than we should be perhaps justified in doing in the present day. At the time when he published his *Dramaturgie* we had scarcely any but French tragedies upon our stages, and the extravagant predilection for them as classical models had not then been combated. At present the national taste has been declared so decidedly against them, that we have nothing to fear from any illusion from that quarter.

It is further said that the French dramatists have to do with a public not only extremely fastidious with respect to the introduction of anything low; and extremely susceptible of the ludicrous, but also extremely impatient. We shall allow them all the credit of this self-flattery; for we can have no doubt that

lete, we shall still find an ample field remaining for our ridicule. In the numerous pieces which are not reckoned among his master-pieces, we have only to turn them up at random to light upon passages susceptible of a ludicrous application. Racine, from the refinement and moderation which were natural to him, was much more secure from this danger; but yet, here and there, many expressions of the same description have escaped from him. We may here include the whole of the speech where Theramenes exhorts his pupil Hippolytus to yield himself up to love. The ludicrous can hardly be carried farther than in these lines:

Craint-on de s'égarer sur les traces d'Hercule?
Quels courages Vénus n'a-t-elle pas domtés?
Vous même, où seriez vous, vous qui la combattez.
Si toujours Antiope, à ses loix opposée,
D'une pudique ardeur n'eût brûlé pour Thésée?

In *Berenice* Antiochus receives his confident, whom he had sent to announce his visit to the Queen, with the words: *Asace entrérons-nous?* This humble patience in an ante-chamber would appear even undignified in comedy, but it appears too pitiful even for a second rate tragical hero. Antiochus says afterwards to the queen:

Je me suis tù cinq ans
Madame, et vrais encore me taire plus long-tems—

And to give an immediate proof of his intention by his conduct he repeats after this no less than fifty verses in a breath.

When Orosman says to *Zaire*, whom he pretends to love with European tenderness,

Je sais que notre loi, favorable aux plaisirs
Ouvre un champ sans limite à nos vœux desirés;

his language is still more indécorous than laughable. But the answer of *Zaire* to her confident, who on this puts her in mind that she is a Christian, is highly comic:

Ah! que dis-tu? pourquoi rappeler mes ennuis?

Upon the whole however Voltaire is much more upon his guard against the ludicrous than his predecessors: this was perfectly natural, for in his time the rage of turning everything into ridicule was most prevalent. We may boldly affirm that in our days a single verse of the description of hundreds in Corneille would infallibly occasion the death of a piece.

their meaning is, that this impatience is a proof of quick apprehension and sharpness of wit. It is susceptible however of another interpretation: superficial knowledge, and more especially an inward emptiness of mind, always display themselves in a fretful impatience. But however this may be, the disposition in question has had both an advantageous and a disadvantageous influence on the structure of their pieces. It has been advantageous in so far as it has compelled them to lop off everything superfluous, to proceed to the main business without circumlocution, to be perspicuous, to study compression, to endeavour to turn every moment to account. All these are good theatrical properties, and have been the means of recommending the French tragedies as models of perfection to those who rather examine works of art by the dry test of the understanding, than listen to the voice of imagination and feeling. It has been disadvantageous in so far as even motion, rapidity, and stretch of expectation, continued without interruption, become at length wearisome and monotonous. It is like a music from which the *piano* should be altogether excluded, and in which even the difference between *forte* and *fortissimo* should not be distinguishable from the mistaken emulation of the performers. I find too few resting places in their tragedies, such as we have everywhere in the ancient tragedies where the lyric enters. There are moments in human life which are dedicated by every religious mind to self-meditation, and when the view is turned towards the past and the future. This sacredness of the moment I do not find to be held in sufficient reverence; the actors as well as the spectators are always equally hurried on to what follows; and we shall find very few scenes indeed, where the development of a mere condition is tranquilly represented independently of the casual connexion. The question with them is always *what* happens, and not sufficiently *how* it happens. And yet *this* is the main thing when an impression is to be made on the witnesses of human events. Hence everything like silent effect is almost entirely excluded from the province of their dramatic art. The only leisure which remains to the actor for silent pantomime is during the delivery of the long discourses addressed to him, when it more frequently serves to embarrass him, than to assist him in the development of his part. They are satisfied if the weaving of the intrigue proceeds in its rapid measure without interruption, and if in the speeches and answers the ball is diligently kept up to the conclusion.

Generally speaking, impatience is by no means a good disposition for the reception of the beautiful. Even dramatic poetry, the most animated production of art, has its contemplative side,

and where this is neglected, the representation then engenders, from its very rapidity and animation, only a deafening noise in our mind, instead of the inward music which ought to accompany it.

Many technical imperfections in their tragedy have been admitted by the French critics themselves; for instance, the confidants. Every hero and heroine regularly drag a person along with them, a gentleman in waiting or a court lady. In not a few pieces, we may count three or four of these merely passive hearers, who sometimes open their lips to tell something to their patron which he must have known better himself, or who are despatched on messages. The confidants in the Greek tragedies, either old tutors and governesses, or servants, have always peculiar characteristic destinations, and the ancient tragedians felt so little the want of communications between a hero and his confidant, in making us acquainted with the state of mind and views of the former, that they even introduce so important a friend as Pylades, whose fame has become proverbial, as a mute personage. But whatever ridicule has been cast on the confidants, and however great the reproach of being reduced to make use of them, down to the time of Alfieri no attempt was ever made to get quit of them.

The expositions or statements of the preliminary situation of things are another nuisance. They generally consist of disclosures to the confidants, delivered in choice language, when they have abundance of leisure on their hands. That very public whose impatience keeps the poets and players under such strict discipline, possesses patience enough, however, to listen to the unfolding in wordy treatises of what ought to be developed before their eyes. It is allowed that an exposition is seldom unexceptionable; that the persons in their speeches begin farther back than they naturally ought, and that they tell one another what they must have known before, &c. If the affair is complicated, these expositions are generally extremely tedious: those of *Heraclius* and *Rodogune* absolutely make the head giddy. *Chaulieu* says of *Crebillon's Rhadamiste*, "The piece would be perfectly clear were it not for the exposition." It seems to me that their whole system of expositions, both in tragedy and in high comedy, is exceedingly defective. Nothing can be more ill judged than to begin at once to instruct us without any dramatic movement. At the drawing up of the curtain the attention of the spectator is almost inevitably distracted by external circumstances, his interest has not yet been excited; and this is precisely the time chosen by the poet to exact from him an earnest and undivided attention to a dry investigation, a demand which he

can hardly be supposed willing to admit. It will perhaps be argued that the very same thing was done by the Greek poets. But the subject was for the most part extremely simple with them, and it was already known to the spectators; and their expositions, with the exception of the unskilful prologues of Euripides, have not the didactic and inculcatory tone of the French, but display life and motion. How admirable again are the expositions of Shakspeare and Calderon! They lay hold of the imagination at the very outset; and when they have once gained over the spectator, they then bring forward the information necessary for the full understanding of the subsequent transactions. This means is, it is true, denied to the French tragic poets, who are very sparingly allowed the use of anything calculated to make an impression on the senses, anything like corporeal action, and who are obliged to reserve the little which is within their power to the last acts, that they may still in some degree heighten the interest of them.

To comprise what I have hitherto observed in a few words: the French have endeavoured to form their tragedy according to a strict idea; but instead of this they have merely hit upon an abstract notion. They require tragical dignity and grandeur, tragical situations, passions, and pathos, altogether naked and pure without foreign appendages. From stripping them in this way of their accompaniments they lose much in truth, profundity, and character; and the whole composition is deprived of the living charm of variety, the magic of picturesque situations, and of all those overpowering effects which can only be produced by the increase of objects under a voluntary abandonment after easy and gradual preparation. With respect to the theory of the tragic art, they are yet nearly at the point in which they were in gardening in the time of Lenotre. The whole merit consists in extorting a triumph from nature by means of art. They have no other idea of regularity than the measured symmetry of straight alleys, clipt hedges, &c. In vain should we labour to make those who lay out such gardens comprehend that there can be any plan, any concealed order in an English park, and demonstrate to them that a succession of landscapes, which from their gradation, their alternation, and their opposition, give effect to each other, all aim at exciting in us a certain disposition of mind.

The rooted and permanent prejudices of a whole nation are seldom accidental, but are connected with a general want of solid knowledge, from which the distinguished minds who lead the rest are not excepted. We are not therefore to consider such prejudices merely as causes; we must consider them also at the same time as important effects. We allow that the narrow system of

rules, that the dissecting intellectual criticism, has shackled the French tragedians; still, however, it remains doubtful whether their own inclinations would have led them to make choice of more comprehensive designs, and whether they could have filled them up. The most distinguished among them have certainly not been deficient in means and talents. In a particular examination of their different productions we cannot show them any favour; but, on a general view, they are more deserving of pity than censure; and when, under such unfavourable circumstances, they have still been able to produce what is excellent, they are doubly entitled to our admiration, although we can by no means admit the justice of the common-place observation, that the overcoming of difficulty is a source of pleasure, nor find anything meritorious in a work of art merely because it is artfully composed.

I have already briefly noticed all that it was necessary to mention of the antiquities of the French stage. The duties of the poet were gradually defined with greater strictness from a belief in the authority of the ancients, and the infallibility of Aristotle. The poets were from their own inclination however led to the Spanish theatres, so long as the dramatic art in France had not attained its full maturity by a native education. They not only imitated the Spaniards, but even borrowed directly from this mine of ingenious invention. I do not merely allude to the earlier time under Richelieu; this state of things continued throughout the whole of the first half of the age of Louis XIV.; and Racine is perhaps the oldest poet who seems to have been altogether unacquainted with the Spaniards, or at least who was in no manner influenced by them. The comedies of Corneille are nearly all of them taken from Spanish pieces; and of his celebrated works the *Cid* and *Don Sancho of Arragon* are also Spanish. The only piece of *Rotrou* which still keeps its place on the theatre, *Wenceslas*, is from Francisco de Roxas: the unfinished *Princess of Elis* of Molière is from Moreto, *Don Garcia of Navarre* from an unknown author, and the *Festin de Pierre* carries its origin in its front:* we have only to look at the works of *Thomas Corneille* to be at once convinced that with the exception of a few they are all Spanish; and so are the earlier labours of *Quinault*, namely, his comedies and tragi-comedies. The right of drawing without scruple from this source was so universal, that the French imitators, when they borrowed without the least disguise, did

* And betrays at the same time Molière's ignorance of the Spanish. For if he had possessed even a tolerable knowledge, how could he have translated *El Convidado de Piedra* (the Stone Guest) into the *Stone Feast*, which has no meaning here, and could only be applicable to the Feasts of Midas?

not even give themselves the trouble of naming the author of the original, and assigning a part of the applause which they might earn to the true owner. In the *Cid* alone the text of the Spanish poet has frequently been cited, because the claim of Corneille to originality was called in question.

We should certainly derive much instruction from an inquiry into the models when they are not among the more celebrated, or when their titles are not known, and instituting a comparison between them and the copies. We must, however, go very differently to work from Voltaire in *Heraclius*, where *Garcia de la Huerta** has uncontestedly proved both his great ignorance, and his studied and disgusting perversions. If the most of these imitations give little pleasure in France in the present day, this decides nothing against the originals, which must always have suffered considerably from the change. The national characters of the French and Spanish are totally different; and consequently the spirit of their language and poetry must be equally distinct. The most empty and confined character belongs to the French; the Spanish, though in the remotest west, displays an oriental vein which may easily be accounted for from its history; it luxuriates in a profusion of bold images and sallies of wit. When we deprive their dramas of these sumptuous ornaments, when, for the glowing colours of their romances and the musical variations of the rhymed strophes in which they are composed, we compel them to assume the monotony of the Alexandrine with the addition of external regularities, while the character and situations are allowed to remain essentially the same, there can no longer be any harmony between the subject and the manner in which it is treated, and it will have forfeited that truth which may still be exhibited in the dominion of fancy.

The charm of the Spanish poetry consists, generally speaking, in the union of sublime and enthusiastic seriousness of feeling, which peculiarly descends from the North, with the lovely breath of the South, and the dazzling pomp of the East. *Corneille* possessed an affinity to the Spanish spirit, but only in the first point; we might take him for a Spaniard, educated in Normandy. It is to be regretted that, instead of depending on foreign models, he had not after the *Cid*, employed himself upon subjects where he might have given himself altogether up to his feelings for chivalrous honour and fidelity. But he had recourse to the Roman history; and the severe patriotism of the older Romans, with the ambitious policy of those of an after period, supplied the place of chivalry, and in some measure assumed its garb. It was

* In the introduction to his *Theatro Hispanol.*

by no means so much his object to excite our terror and compassion as our admiration for the characters, and astonishment at the situations, of his heroes. He hardly ever affects us, and is seldom capable of producing agitation.—Here I might indeed observe, that such is his partiality for admiration, that not contented with exacting it for the heroism of virtue, he claims it also for the heroism of vice, from the boldness, strength of soul, presence of mind, and elevation above all human feelings, which he exhibits in his criminals of both sexes. Nay, it often happens that his characters express themselves in the language of ostentatious pride, without our being well able to see of what they have to be proud: they are merely proud of their pride. We cannot often say that we take an interest in them: they either appear to stand in no need of our compassion from the great resources which they possess within themselves, or they are undeserving of it. He has represented the conflict of passion and motives; but for the most part not immediately as such, but already metamorphosed into a contest of principles. He has been found coldest in love; and this was because he could not prevail on himself to paint it as an amiable weakness, although he everywhere introduced it, even where it was very unsuitable, either from a condescension for the taste of the age or a private inclination for chivalry, where love always appears as the ornament of valour, as the checkered favour waving at the lance, as the elegant ribbon-knot to the sword. He seldom paints love as a power which imperceptibly steals upon us, and at last gains an involuntary and irresistible dominion over us; but as an homage freely chosen to the exclusion of duty at first, but afterwards maintaining its place along with it. This is the case at least in his better pieces; for in his latter works love is frequently compelled to give way to ambition; and these two springs naturally weaken each other. His females are generally not sufficiently feminine; and the love which they inspire is with them not the last object, but merely a means. They stimulate their lovers to great dangers, and sometimes also to great crimes; and the men appear often to suffer from allowing themselves to be mere instruments in the hands of women, and to be despatched on heroic messages as it were by the women, for the sake of winning the prize of love previously held out to them. Such women as *Emelia in Cinna and Rodogune* must be unsusceptible of love. But if *Corneille* has departed from truth, in his principal characters by exaggerating the energetical and underrating the passive part of our nature, if his heroes display too much volition, and too little feeling, he is still much more unnatural in his situation. He has, in defiance of all probability, pointed them in such a way, that we

might properly give them the appellation of tragical antitheses; so that the expression of a series of epigrammatical maxims may be said to be natural in them. He is fond of exhibiting the most symmetrical oppositions. His eloquence is often admirable from its strength and compression; but it sometimes degenerates into bombast, and exhausts itself in superfluous accumulations. The later Romans, Seneca the philosopher, and Lucan, were too much considered by him in the light of models; and unfortunately he also possessed a vein of Seneca the tragedian. From this wearisome pomp of declamation, a few simple words here and there interspersed have been often made the subject of extravagant praise.* If they stood alone they would certainly be entitled to praise; but they are immediately followed by long speeches which soon destroy their effect. When the Spartan mother, on delivering the shield to her son, used the well known words, "This, or on this!" she certainly made no farther addition to them. Corneille was peculiarly well qualified for exhibiting ambition and the lust of power, a passion which stifles all other human feelings, and never properly erects its throne till the mind has previously become a cold and dreary wilderness. His youth was passed in the last civil wars, and he still saw remains of the feudal independence. I will not pretend to decide how much this may have influenced him, but it is undeniable that the sense which he often showed of the great importance of political questions, was altogether unknown to the following age, and first made its appearance again in Voltaire. He paid however his tribute of flattery to Louis the Fourteenth, like the rest of the poets of his time, in verses which are now forgotten.

Racine, who has not yet during a whole century been decidedly declared the favourite poet of the French nation, was by no means during his life, in so enviable a situation, and, notwithstanding many proofs of brilliant success, could not then repose in the pleasing and undisturbed possession of his fame. His merits in giving the last polish to the French language, his unrivalled excellencies of expression and versification, were not then allowed; on the stage he had rivals who partly obtained an undeserved preference over him. On the one hand, the exclusive admirers of Corneille, with Madame Sevigné at their head, made a formal party against him; on the other hand, Pradon, who was a much younger man than himself, endeavoured to obtain the victory over him, and he actually succeeded, it would appear, not merely in

* For instance, the *Qu'il mourût* of the old Horatius; the *Soyons amis*, *Cinna*; also the *Moi* of *Medea* which, we may observe in passing, is borrowed from Seneca.

gaining over the crowd, but the very court itself, notwithstanding the zeal with which he was opposed by Boileau. The chagrin to which this gave rise unfortunately interrupted his theatrical career at the very period when his mind had attained its full maturity; he was afterwards prevented by a mistaken piety from returning to his theatrical employment, and it required all the influence of Madame Maintenon to induce him to employ himself upon religious subjects for a particular occasion. It is probable that he would have still carried the art a great deal higher, for in the works which we have we uniformly perceive a successive improvement. He is a poet in every respect deserving of our love: he possessed a great susceptibility for all the more tender emotions, and great sweetness in the manner of expressing them. His moderation, which never allowed him to transgress the bounds of propriety, we will not estimate too highly, for he did not possess any superfluity of strength of character, nay, there are even marks of weakness perceptible in him, which it is said he also exhibited in his private life. He has also paid his homage to the luscious gallantry of his age, where it merely serves as a show of love to connect together the intrigue; but he has often also completely succeeded in the delineation of a more genuine love, especially in his female characters; and many of his amatory scenes breathe a tender voluptuousness, which, from the veil of reserve and modesty thrown over it, steals only the more seductively into the soul. The inconsistencies of unsuccessful passion, the wanderings of a distempered mind in prey to an irresistible desire, he has portrayed with more emotion and fervour than any French poet before him, or even perhaps after him. Generally speaking, he was more inclined to the elegiac and the idyllic, than to the heroic. I will not say that he would never have elevated himself to more serious and dignified conceptions as in *Britannicus* and *Mithridat*; but here we must distinguish between what his subject suggested to him, and what he drew with peculiar fondness, where he is less to be considered as a dramatic artist than as speaking the language of his own feelings. However, it ought not to be forgotten that Racine composed the most of his pieces when he was very young, and that his choice may easily be supposed to have been influenced by that circumstance. He seldom disgusts us with the undisguised repulsiveness of unnecessary crimes, like Corneille and Voltaire; he has often however concealed what in reality is hard, base, and low, under forms of politeness and courtesy. I cannot allow the designs of his pieces to be unexceptionable, as the French critics would have them; those which he borrowed from the ancient mythology are, in my opinion, the most liable to objection: but I believe, with the rules and obser-

vations which he took for his guide, he could hardly in most cases have extricated himself from his difficulties more cautiously and properly than he has actually done. Whatever may be the defects of his productions separately considered, when we compare him with others, and view him in connexion with the French literature in general, we can hardly bestow upon him too high a praise.

A new epoch of French Tragedy begins with *Voltaire*, whose first appearance on the theatre, in his early youth, followed close upon the age of Louis the Fourteenth. I have already, in a general way, alluded to the changes and enlargements which he projected, and partly carried into execution. *Corneille* and *Racine* may be said to have led a true artist's life: they were dramatic poets with their whole soul; their desire, as authors, was confined to that object alone, and all their studies were directed to the stage. But *Voltaire* wished to shine in every possible department; a restless vanity would not allow him to be satisfied with the attempt to attain perfection in any one walk of literature; and from the variety of subjects on which his mind was employed, it was impossible for him to avoid shallowness and immaturity of ideas. To form a correct idea of his relation to his two predecessors in the tragic art, we must institute a comparison between the characteristic features of the preceding classical age and that in which he gave the tone. In the time of Louis the Fourteenth, the traditionary belief respecting the most important concerns of humanity remained undisturbed; and in poetry, the object was not so much to enrich the mind, as to form it by means of a free and noble entertainment. But the want of thinking began at length to be felt: it unfortunately happened, however, that bold presumption hurried far before profound inquiry, and hence the increase of public immorality was followed by a dangerous scepticism, from the ridicule of which no object was sacred, and which shook the foundations of every conviction which had a reference to religion, morals, and the preservation of the social union. *Voltaire* was by turns philosopher, rhetorician, sophist, and buffoon. The impurity by which his views were in part characterized, was irreconcilable with a complete impartiality in his theatrical career. As he saw the public longing for information, which was rather tolerated by the favour of the great than authorized and formally approved of by the public institutions, he did not fail to meet their wishes, and to deliver, in beautiful verses, on the stage, what no man durst yet preach from the pulpit or the professor's chair. He made use of poetry as a means to accomplish ends which are foreign to it;

and this has often polluted the poetical purity of his compositions. In *Mahomet* he wished to exhibit the dangers of fanaticism, or rather, laying aside all circumlocution, the belief in any revelation whatever. For this purpose, he has most unjustifiably disfigured a great historical character, loaded him in a revolting manner with the most shocking crimes, at the expense of our tortured feelings. As he was universally known as the bitter enemy of Christianity, he bethought himself of a new triumph for his vanity, by making christian sentiments in *Zaire* and *Alzire* the means of exciting our emotion: and here for once his versatile heart, which was susceptible of a feeling for goodness in momentary ebullitions, shamed the rooted malice of his understanding; he actually succeeded, and these affecting and religious passages cry out loudly against him for the idle abuse in which his petulant ignorance so often indulged. In England he acquired a knowledge of a freer constitution, and became an enthusiastic admirer of freedom.—Corneille introduced the Roman republicanism and politics in general into his works, for the sake of their poetical energy; Voltaire again exhibited them under a poetical form, that they might have a political effect on the popular opinion. As he imagined that he was better acquainted with the Greeks than his predecessors, and as he had obtained a slight knowledge of the English theatre and Shakspeare, which were before undiscovered islands for France, he wished in like manner to derive every advantage from them.—He insisted on the seriousness, the severity, and simplicity of the Greeks; and actually in so far approached them, that he excluded love from various subjects to which it did not properly belong. He was desirous of reviving the majesty of the Grecian scene; and here his endeavours had this good effect, that in his theatrical works the eye was no longer so miserably neglected. He borrowed from Shakspeare, as he thought, a boldness of theatrical effect; but here he was the least successful; when, in imitation of that great master, he ventured in *Semiramis* to call up a ghost from the other world, he fell into the commission of innumerable absurdities. In a word, he was perpetually making experiments in the dramatic art; and at different times he availed himself of totally different means for effect. Hence his works have occasionally remained half way between studies and finished productions; we perceive something unfixed and unfinished in his whole formation. Corneille and Racine are much more perfect within the limits which they have prescribed to themselves; they are altogether that which they are, and we have no glimpses in their works of anything of a higher or different description. Voltaire's claims are much more extensive than his means. Cor-

neille has expressed the maxims of heroism with greater sublimity, and Racine the natural emotions with greater sweetness; but we must allow that Voltaire has introduced the springs of morality with greater effect into the drama, and that he displays a more intimate acquaintance with the original relations of the mind. Hence, in some of his pieces, he is more powerfully affecting than either of the other two.

The first and last only of these three masters of the French tragic stage may be said to be fruitful; though even this they cannot be accounted, when compared with the Greeks. That Racine was not more prolific, was indeed partly owing to accidental circumstances in his life. He enjoys this advantage, however, that with the exception of his first youthful attempts, the whole of his pieces have kept possession of the stage, and the public estimation. But many of the pieces of Corneille and Voltaire, which even pleased at first, have since disappeared, and are now not even so much as read; on which account, selections from their works have been published under the title of *Chef-d'œuvres*. It is remarkable, that few of the numerous tragical attempts in France have succeeded. La Harpe reckons, that about a thousand tragedies have been acted or printed since the death of Racine, and that about thirty only, besides those of Voltaire have kept possession of the theatre. Notwithstanding the great competition in this department, the tragical repertory of the French is therefore far from ample. We will not undertake to give a full account of their theatrical stores; and it is still farther from the object of our undertaking to enter into a circumstantial and anatomical investigation of separate pieces. We can only, with a rapid pen, notice the character and relative worth of the most distinguished works of these three masters, and of a few others deserving of favourable mention.

* Corneille opened the career of his fame, in the most brilliant manner, with the *Cid*, of which, indeed, the execution alone is his own: the plan of the Spaniard appears to have been closely followed by him. The *Cid* of Guillen de Castro has never come into my hands, so that it has not been in my power to institute an accurate comparison between the two works. But were we to judge from the specimens produced, the Spanish piece seems to have been written with much greater simplicity than the French; and the subject was first adorned with rhetorical pomp by Corneille. We are ignorant, however, of what he has left out and sacrificed. All the French critics are agreed that the part of the Infanta is superfluous. They do not see, with the Spanish poet, that when a princess, forgetful of her elevated rank, entertains an inclination for Rodrigo, and wishes to distinguish him as the flower of an amiable order of knighthood, this must serve as a

stronger justification of the love of Chimene, which so many powerful motives could not overcome. It is true, the passion of the Infanta ought to have been more musically developed, and the deeds of Rodrigo against the Moors more epically, that is, more contemplatively related, to produce that pleasure and general effect for which they were intended; they probably are so in the Spanish. The rapture with which this piece was universally received on its first appearance, a piece which betrays no trace of any ignoble motives, and which is altogether founded on the conflict between the purest feelings of honour, love, and paternal duty, is a strong proof that the romantic spirit was not yet extinguished among spectators who could give themselves up to such natural impressions. This was altogether misunderstood by the learned; they affirmed, with the academy at their head, that this subject (one of the most beautiful which ever fell to the lot of any poet) was unfit for tragedy; they censured, in their incapacity of entering historically into another age, many supposed improbabilities and improprieties.* The *Cid* is certainly not a tragedy in the sense of the ancients; and it was at first called a *tragi-comedy* by the poet. Would that this had been the only occasion in which the authority of Aristotle has been applied to subjects which do not belong to his jurisdiction!

The Horatii has been censured for want of unity:—The murder of the sister and the acquittal of the victorious Roman, is said to be a second action, independent of the combat of the Horatii and Curiatii. Corneille himself was talked into a persuasion of this. It appears to me, however, that it may admit of the most satisfactory justification. If the murder of Camilla had not made a part of the piece, the women could have had nothing to do in the first acts; and without the triumph of patriotism over family ties, the combat could not have been an action, but merely an event destitute of tragical intrigue. But it is a real defect, in my opinion, in Corneille, to have represented a public act which was to decide the fate of two states, as taking place altogether *intra privatos parietes*, and to have stripped it of every visible accompaniment. Hence we are to account for the great flatness of the fifth act.—What a different impression would have been produced had Horatius been solemnly condemned, in obedience to strict law, in presence of the king and people, and afterwards saved through the tears and entreaties of his father, agreeably to the description of Livy. Moreover, the poet, not satisfied with representing one sister of the Horatii in love with

* Scuderi speaks even of Chimene as a monster, and calls the whole off-hand, "*ce mechant combat de l'amour et de l'honneur.*" Admirable! Here was a man acquainted with the romantic.

one of the Curiatii, as in history, thought proper to invent the marriage of a sister of the Curiatii to one of the Horatii: and as in the former female the love of country yields to personal inclination, in the latter personal inclination yields to love of country. This occasions a great improbability: for with such a known family connexion, how would men have been selected for the combat who had the most powerful reasons for sparing each other? Besides, the murder of the sister by the conqueror can only be supportable, if we suppose him in all the boiling confidence of ungovernable youth. Horatius, already a husband, ought to have shown more wisdom and mildness in bearing with his unfortunate sister's language, otherwise he would have been a ferocious savage.

Cinna is commonly ranked much higher than *the Horatii*; although, in the purity of the sentiments, a great falling off from the ideal sphere, in which the action of the two preceding pieces moves, is here perceptible. All is complicated and diseased in a variety of ways. *Cinna's* republicanism is merely the cloak of another passion: he is a tool in the hands of *Emilia*, who, on her part, constantly sacrifices her pretended love to her revenge. The magnanimity of *Augustus* is ambiguous: it appears rather the caution of a tyrant grown timid through age. The conspiracy is thrust into the back ground with a splendid narration: it does not excite in us that gloomy apprehension which so theatrical an object ought to do. *Emilia*, the soul of the piece, is called by the witty *Balzac*, when speaking in praise of the work, "an adorable fury." Yet the furies themselves could be appeased by purification and punishment: but benevolence and generosity are in vain shown to *Emilia*, whose heart remains insensible to every means of mollification; the adoration of so unfeminine a creature is hardly pardonable even in a lover. Hence she has no better adorers than *Cinna* and *Maximus*, two great villains, whose repentance comes too late to allow us to imagine it sincere.

Here we have the first specimens of that Machiavelian policy, by which the poetry of *Corneille* was entirely disfigured at an after period, and which is not only repulsive, but also for the most part both clumsy and unsuitable. He flattered himself, that in knowledge of men and the world, in an acquaintance with courts and politics, he surpassed the most clear-seeing. With a mind naturally alive to honour, he conceived that he had made himself master "of the murderous doctrine of Machiavel;" and he displays, in a broad and didactic manner, all the knowledge which he had acquired of these arts. He had no suspicion that an unscrupulous and selfish policy goes smoothly to work, and always appears under a borrowed guise. If he had been capable

of anything of this kind, he might have taken a lesson from Richelieu.

Of the remaining pieces in which Corneille has painted the Roman freedom and love of dominion, the *Death of Pompey* is the most prominent. It is full, however, of a grandeur which is more dazzling than genuine; and, indeed, we could expect nothing else from a cento of hyperbolical antitheses from Lucan. These bravura flourishes of rhetoric are strung together on the thread of a clumsy plot. The intrigues of Ptolemy, and the ambitious coquetry of his sister Cleopatra, have a miserable appearance by the side of the description of the fate of the great Pompey, the rage-breathing sorrow of his wife, and the magnanimous compassion of Cæsar. Scarcely has the conqueror performed the last duty to the reluctant shade of his rival, when he pours out his homage at the feet of the beautiful Queen: he is not only in love, but in love with sighs and flames. Cleopatra, on her part, according to the poet's own expression, is desirous, by her love-ogling, of gaining possession of the sceptre of her brother. Cæsar certainly made love, in his own way, to a number of women: but these cynical loves, if represented with anything like truth, would be most unfit for the stage. Who can refrain from laughing, when Rome, in the speech of Cæsar, implores the *chaste* love of Cleopatra for young Cæsar?

In *Sertorius*, a much later work, Corneille has contrived to make the great Pompey appear little, and the hero ridiculous. Sertorius, on one occasion, exclaims,—

Que c'est un sort cruel d'aimer par politique!

This may be applied to the whole of the persons in the piece. They are not in the least in love with one another; but they allow a pretended love to be subservient to political ends. Sertorius, a hardened and gray-haired warrior, acts the lover with the Spanish Queen, Viriata: he puts forward, however, another person, and offers himself to Aristia; as Viriata presses him to marry her on the spot, he begs anxiously for a short delay; Viriata, along with her other elegant phrases, says roundly, that she neither knows love nor hatred; Aristia, the repudiated wife of Pompey, says to him, "Take me back again, or I will marry another;" Pompey beseeches her to wait only till the death of Sylla, whom he dare not offend, without mentioning anything of the low scoundrel Perpenna. The disposition to this frigidity of soul was perceptible in Corneille, even at an early period; but it increased in an incredible degree in the works of his age.

In *Polyeucte*, Christian sentiments are not unworthily expressed.

ed; yet we find in it more superstitious reverence, than fervent enthusiasm for religion: the wonders of grace are rather affirmed, than conceived with mysterious illumination. Both the tone and the situations, in the first acts, incline very much to comedy, as has already been observed by Voltaire. A female, who has married against her inclinations from obedience to her father, who declares both to her lover, who returns when too late, and to her husband, that she still entertains a tenderness for the former, but that she will keep within the bounds of virtue; a vulgar and selfish father, who is sorry that the first suitor, who has now become the favourite of the Emperor, was not preferred by him as his son-in-law;—all this promises no very high tragical determinations. The divided heart of Paulina is in nature, and consequently does not detract from the interest of the piece. It is generally agreed, that her situation, and the character of Severus, constitute the principal charm of this drama. But the practical magnanimity of this Roman, who has to conquer his passion, throws the renunciation of Polyeucte, which appears to cost him nothing, very much into the shade. A conclusion has been attempted to be drawn from this, that martyrdom is, in general, an unfavourable subject for tragedy. But nothing can be more unjust. The gladness with which martyrs embraced pain and death did not proceed from want of feeling, but from the heroism of the highest love: they must previously, in struggles painful beyond expression, have obtained the victory over every earthly tie; and by the exhibition of these struggles, of these sufferings of our mortal nature, while the seraph takes its flight to heaven, the poet may awaken in us the most fervent emotion. The means by which the catastrophe is brought about in *Polyeucte*, namely, the dull and low artifice of Felix, by which the endeavours of Severus to save his rival contribute to his destruction, are contemptible beyond expression.

How much Corneille delighted in the symmetrical play of antitheses in his intrigues, we may easily see, from his declaring *Rodogune* his favourite work. I shall content myself with referring to Lessing, who has pleasantly enough exhibited the ridiculous appearance which the two distressed princes cut, with a mother who says, "He who murders his mistress I shall name heir to the throne," and a mistress who says, "He who murders his mother shall be chosen by me for a husband." The best and shortest way of going to work would have been to have locked up the two furies together. Voltaire returns always to the mention of the fifth act, which he declares to be one of the most noble productions of the French stage. This singular way of judging works of art, by which the parts are praised in oppo-

sition to the whole, without which it is impossible for them to exist, is altogether foreign to our way of thinking.

With respect to *Heracles*, Voltaire gives himself the unnecessary labour to show that Calderon did not imitate Corneille; and, on the other hand, he labours, with little success, to deny that the latter had the Spanish author before him, and availed himself of his labours. Corneille, it is true, gives the whole out as his own invention; but we must recollect, that it was only when hard pressed that he acknowledged what he owed to the author of the Spanish *Cid*. The chief circumstance of the plot, namely, the uncertainty of the tyrant Phocas which of the two youths is his own son, or the son of his murdered predecessor, bears great resemblance to that of a drama of Calderon, and nothing of the kind is to be found in history; in other respects the plot is, it is true, altogether different. However this may be, in Calderon the ingenious boldness of extravagant invention corresponds always with the heightening of the tragical colouring of poetry; whereas in Corneille, after our head has become giddy in endeavouring to disentangle a complicated and ill-contrived intrigue, we are only recompensed by a succession of tragical epigrams, without the least enjoyment for the fancy.

Nicomedes is a political comedy, the dryness of which is hardly in any degree compensated for by the ironical tone which runs throughout the speeches of the hero.

This is nearly all that now appears of Corneille on the stage. His later works are, throughout, merely treatises in a pompous dialogical form, on reasons of state in certain difficult conjunctures. — We might represent a party at chess, as well as a tragedy.

Those who have the patience to labour through the forgotten pieces of Corneille will perceive with astonishment, that they are constructed on the same principles, and, with the exception of negligences of style, executed with the same expense of what he considered art, as his admired productions. For example, *Attila*, in the plot, bears a striking resemblance to *Rodogune*. In his own decisions, it is impossible not to be struck with the very unessential things on which he puts a stress, and that he should never once consider the laying open the depths of the minds and destinies of men, certainly the highest object of tragical composition, as a matter of the slightest concern. In the unfavourable reception which he has frequently to recount, he always finds some excuse for his self-love, some subsidiary circumstance to which the fate of his piece was to be attributed.

In the two first youthful attempts of Racine, nothing deserves to be remarked, but the flexibility with which he accommodated himself to the limits fixed by Corneille to the career then opened

to him. In the *Andromache* he broke loose from them, and first became himself. He expressed the inward struggles and inconsistencies of passion, with a truth and energy which had never before been heard on the French stage. The fidelity of Andromache to the memory of her husband, and her maternal tenderness are beautifully affecting; even the proud Hermione carries us along with her in her wild aberrations. Her aversion to Orestes, after he had become the instrument of her revenge, and her awaking from her blind fury to utter helplessness and despair, may almost be called tragically grand. The male parts, as is generally the case with Racine, are not so advantageously drawn. The continual threatenings of Pyrrhus to deliver up Astyanax, if Andromache should not listen to him, with his gallant asseverations, resembles the art of an executioner, who applies the torture to his victim with the most courtly phrases. We have difficulty in conceiving Orestes, after his horrible deed, as following in the train of a proud beauty. Not the least mention is made of the murder of his mother; he appears to have completely forgotten it throughout the whole piece: why then do the furies come all at once towards the end? This is a singular contradiction. The connecting together of the whole bears too great a resemblance to certain sports of children, where one always runs before and tries to surprise the other.

In *Britannicus*, I have already praised the historical fidelity of the picture. Nero, Agrippina, Narcissus, and Burrhus, are so accurately drawn, and finished with such light allusions and such a delicate mixture of colouring, that, in respect to character, it yields, perhaps, to no French tragedy whatever. Racine has here possessed the art of giving us to understand much that is left unsaid, and enabling us to look forward into futurity. I will only censure one inconsistency which has escaped the poet. He paints to us the cruel voluptuary, whom education has only in appearance tamed, when he first breaks loose from the restraints of discipline and virtue. Yet Narcissus, at the close of the fourth act, speaks as if he had even then exhibited himself as a player and a charioteer before the people. He first sunk to this ignominy after being hardened by the commission of grave crimes. To represent the complete Nero, that is, the flattering and cowardly tyrant, in the same person, with the vain and fantastical being who, as poet, singer, player, and almost as juggler, was desirous of admiration, and recited even Homeric verses in the agony of death, could alone be compatible with a mixed drama, in which tragical dignity is not required throughout the whole piece.

To *Berenice*, composed in honour of a virtuous princess, the French critics seem to me, in general, extremely unjust. It is

an idyllic tragedy, ~~no doubt~~; but it is full of tenderness of mind. No person was more skilled than Racine in throwing a certain veil of dignity over female weakness.—Who can doubt that Berenice has long before given every proof of her tenderness to Titus, though this is carefully veiled over? She is like a Magdalena of Guido, who languishingly repents her renunciation. The chief error of the piece is the tiresome part of Antiochus.

On the first representation of *Bajazet*, Corneille, it seems, was heard to say, these Turks are very much Frenchified. The censure, as is well known, principally attaches to the parts of Bajazet and Atalide. The old Grand Vizier is certainly Turkish enough; and were a Sultana ever to become the Sultan, she would perhaps throw the handkerchief in the same Sultanic manner as the disgusting Roxane. I have already observed that Turkey, in its naked rudeness, could hardly bear representation before a cultivated public. Racine felt this, and merely refined the forms without changing the main incidents. The mutes and the strangling are motives which could hardly be suspected in the Seraglio; and so he gives, on several occasions, very elegant circumlocutory descriptions of strangling. This is, however, inconsistent; when people are so familiar with the idea of a thing, they call it also by its true name.

The intrigue of *Mithridate*, as Voltaire has remarked, bears great resemblance to that of the *Miser* of Molière. Two brothers are rivals for the bride of their father, who cunningly extorts from her the name of her favoured lover, by feigning a wish to renounce in his favour. The confusion of both sons, when they learn that their father, whom they believed dead, is still alive, and will speedily make his appearance, is in reality exceedingly comic.—The one calls out: *Qu'avons nous fait?* This is the fear of school-boys, when conscious of some impropriety, on the unexpected entrance of their master. The political scene, where Mithridates consults his sons respecting his grand project of conquering Rome, and in which Racine successfully vies with Corneille, is logically interwoven in the plan; but still it is unsuitable to the tone of the whole, and the impression which it is intended to produce. All the interest is centered in Monime: she is one of the amiable creations of Racine, and excites in us a tender commiseration.

On no work of this poet will the sentence of German readers differ more from that of the French critics and their whole public, than *Iphigenie*.—Voltaire declares it the tragedy of all times and all nations, which approaches as near to perfection as is consistent with human endeavours; and in this opinion he is universally followed by his countrymen. But we see in it only a

modernized Greek tragedy, of which the manners are inconsistent with the mythological traditions, of which the simplicity is destroyed by the intriguing Eriphile, and in which the amorous Achilles, however contumacious his behaviour, is altogether insupportable. La Harpe affirms that the Achilles of Racine is even more Homeric than that of Euripides. What shall we say to this? Before acquiescing in the sentence of such critics, we must forget the Greeks.

Respecting *Phedre* I may express myself with the greater brevity, as I have already dedicated a separate treatise to that tragedy. However much Racine may have borrowed from Euripides and Seneca, and however much he may have spoiled the former and not improved the latter, yet still it was a great step from the affected mannerism of his age to a more genuine tragic style. When we compare it with the *Phædra* of Pradon, which was so well received by his contemporaries for no other reason than because no trace whatever of the ancients was discernible in it, but everything reduced to the scale of a fashionable miniature portrait for a toilette, we must entertain the higher admiration of the poet who had such a strong feeling for the ancient poets, who had the courage to connect himself with them, and who dared to display so much purity and unaffected simplicity, in an age of which the prevailing taste was every way vitiated and unnatural. If Racine actually said, that the only difference between his *Phædra* and that of Pradon was, that he knew how to write, he did himself the most crying injustice, and must have allowed himself to be blinded by the miserable doctrine of his friend Boileau, which made the essence of poetry to consist in diction and versification, instead of the display of imagination and fancy.

The two last pieces of Racine belong, as is well known, to a very different epoch of his life: they were both written at the instigation of the same person; but they are extremely dissimilar to each other. *Esther* scarcely merits the name of a tragedy; written for the entertainment of well-bred young women in a pious seminary, it does not rise much beyond its destination. It had however a most astonishing success. The invitation to the representations in St. Cyr was looked upon as a court favour; flattery and scandal delighted to discover allusions throughout the piece; Ahasuerus was said to represent Louis the Fourteenth; *Esther*, Madame de Maintenon; the proud Vasti, who is only incidentally alluded to, Madame de Montespan; and Haman, the minister Louvois. This is certainly rather a profane application of the sacred history, if we can suppose the poet to have had any such object in view. In *Athalie*, however, he exhibited himself for the last time, before taking leave of poetry and the world, in his

whole strength. It is not only his most finished work, but I have no hesitation in declaring it, of all the French tragedies, to be the only one which, free from all mannerism, approaches the most to the grand style of the Greeks. The chorus is fully in the sense of the ancients, though introduced in a different manner for the sake of suiting our music, and the different arrangement of our theatre. The scene has all the majesty of a public action. Expectation, emotion, and keen agitation succeed each other, and always rise with the progress of the drama: in the severe abstinence from everything foreign, there is a display of the richest variety; sometimes of sweetness, but more frequently of majesty and grandeur. The inspiration of the prophet elevates the fancy to flights of more than usual boldness. The signification is that which a religious drama ought to have: on earth, the struggle between good and evil; and in heaven, the wakeful eye of providence darting down rays of decision from unapproachable glory. All is animated by one breath; by the pious inspiration of the poet; of the genuineness of which, neither his life nor his work will allow us to entertain a doubt. This is the very thing in which so many pretended works of art of the French are deficient: the authors have not been inspired by a fervent love for the subject, but the desire of external effect; and hence the vanity of the artist everywhere breaks forth, and throws a damp over our feelings.

The unfortunate fate of this piece is well known. Scruples of conscience respecting the impropriety of all theatrical representations (which appear to be exclusively entertained by the Gallacan church, for both in Italy and Spain men of religion and piety have thought very differently on this subject) prevented the representation in St. Cyr; it appeared in print, and was universally abused and reprobated; and this state of things continued long even after the death of Racine. So incapable of everything serious was the puerile state of that age.

Among the poets of the period in question, the *younger Corneille* deserves to be mentioned, who sought less to excite astonishment by heroism, like his brother, than to gain over the favour of the spectators by "those tendernesses which give so much pleasure," in the words of Pradon. Of his numerous tragedies, two only, the *Comte d'Essex* and *Ariadne*, keep possession of the stage; the rest are consigned to oblivion. The latter, composed after the model of *Berenice*, is a tragedy of which the catastrophe may, properly speaking, be said to consist in a swoon. The situation of the resigned and enamoured Ariadne, who, after all her sacrifices, sees herself abandoned by Theseus and betrayed by her own sister, is expressed with great truth of feeling. Whenever an actress, with a prepossessing figure and sweet voice,

appears in this character, she is sure to excite our interest. The other parts, the cold and deceitful Theseus, the intriguing Phædra, who continues her deceptions towards her confiding sister to the last, the procuring Pirithous, and King Cénarus, who incessantly offers himself to supply the place of the faithless lover, are all too pitiful, and frequently even laughable. Moreover, the desert rocks of Naxos are here smoothed down to modern drawing-rooms; and the princes who people them seek, in a polished manner, to out-wit each other, and to whisper their soft things to the unfortunate princess, who alone has anything like pretensions to nature.

Crebillon, in point of time, comes between Racine and Voltaire, though he was also the rival of the latter. A numerous party wished to oppose him, when far advanced in years, to Voltaire, and even to give him a much higher place. Nothing, however, but the utmost rancour of party, or the utmost depravity of taste, or, what is most probable, the two together, could lead them to such signal injustice. Far from having contributed to the purification of the tragic art, he evidently attached himself, not to the better, but the affected authors of the age of Louis the Fourteenth. In his total ignorance of the ancients, he has the arrogance to rank himself above them. His favourite books were the antiquated romances of a Calprenède, and others of a similar stamp: from these he derived his extravagant and ill connected plots. One of the means to which he everywhere has recourse, is the unconscious or intentional disguise of the principal characters under the names of others; the first example of which was given in *Heraclius*.—Thus, Orestes in his *Electra* first becomes known to himself towards the middle of the piece. The brother and sister, and a son and daughter of Ægisthus are nearly exclusively occupied with their double amours, which neither contribute to, nor injure, the main action; and Clytemnestra is killed by a wound from Orestes, who does not know her, inflicted against his will. He abounds in extravagances of every kind; of which the impudence of *Semiramis* in persisting in her love, after she learns that the object of it is her own son, may be mentioned as one instance. A few empty ravings and common-place displays of terror, have gained for Crebillon the appellation of the *terrible*, which may afford us a standard for the barbarous and affected taste of the age, and the infinite distance from nature and truth to which they had then fallen. It is as if, in painting we should give to Coypel the appellation of the majestic.

To Voltaire, from his first entrance on his dramatic career, we must allow both the conviction that higher and more extensive efforts remained to be made, and the zeal to execute what was yet

undone. How far he was successful, and how much he was himself blinded by the national prejudices against which he contended, is another question. For the more easy review of his works, it will be useful to rank together the pieces in which he handled mythological materials, and those which he derived from the Roman history.

His earliest tragedy, *Œdipe*, is a mixture of approximation to the Greeks* (with the exception, as may be supposed, of doing better), and of compliance with the prevailing manner. The best traits Voltaire owed to Sophocles, whom he slanders in his preface; and in comparison with whose catastrophe his own is flat in the extreme. Not a little, however, was transferred by him from the frigid *Œdipus* of Corneille into his own; and more especially the love of Philoctetus to Jocaste, which may be said to correspond nearly with that of Theseus and Dirce in Corneille. Voltaire alleged in his defence the tyranny of the players, from which a young and unknown writer cannot withdraw himself. We may remark the frequent allusions to priests, superstition, &c. which even at that early period betray the future direction of his mind.

In *Merope*, a work of his ripest years, he intended to give us a perfect example of the revival of the Greek tragedy, an undertaking of so great difficulty, and so long announced with every kind of preparation. Its real merit is the exclusion of the traditional love scenes (of which, however, Racine had already given an example in the *Athalie*); for in other respects, we hardly need to put German readers in mind how much of it is not conceived in the true Grecian spirit. The confidants are also entirely after the old cut. The other defects of the piece have been circumstantially, and, I might almost say, much too severely, censured by Lessing. The tragedy of *Merope* can hardly fail of a certain degree of favour, if well represented. This is owing to the nature of the subject. The passionate love of a mother, in dread lest she should lose her only good, threatened with oppression, supporting her trials with heroic constancy, and at last triumphant, is altogether a picture of such truth and beauty, that the compassion becomes beneficent, and remains free from every painful ingredient. Still we must not

* His admiration of them seems to have been more derived from foreign influence than from individual study. He relates in his letter to the Duchess of Maine, prefixed to *Oreste*, that in his early youth he had access to a princely house where they used to read Sophocles, and make extemporary translations from him, and where there were men who acknowledged the superiority of the Greek Theatre over the French. We should in vain seek for such men in France in the present day, among people of any distinction, from the universal depreciation of the study of the classics.

forget that the piece belongs only in a very limited manner to Voltaire. How much he has borrowed, and not always changed for the better, from *Maffei*, has been also shown by Lessing.

Among the transformations of Greek tragedies, *Oreste*, the latest, appears to me the most remote from the antique simplicity and severity, although it is free from any mixture of love, and mere confidants are avoided. That Orestes should undertake to destroy Ægisthus is nowise singular, and merited no such strong delineation in the tragical annals of the world. It is the case which Aristotle lays down as the most indifferent, where one enemy knowingly attacks the other. And here neither Orestes nor Electra have anything farther in view: Clytemnestra is to be spared; no oracle consigns to her own son the execution of the punishment due to her guilt. But even the deed in question is hardly executed by Orestes himself: he goes to Ægisthus, falls, we may well say, simply enough into the net, and is only saved by an insurrection of the people. According to the ancients, he was commanded by the oracle to attack the criminals with cunning, as they had so attacked Agamemnon. This was just retaliation: to fall in open conflict would have been too honourable a death for Ægisthus. Voltaire has added, of his own invention, that he was also prohibited by the oracle from revealing himself to his sister; and, as carried away by fraternal love, he breaks this injunction, he is blinded by the furies, and involuntarily perpetrates the maternal murder. These are certainly wonderful ideas to assign to the gods, and a most unexampled punishment for a slight, nay, even a noble crime. The incidental and unintentional stabbing of Clytemnestra was borrowed by Voltaire from Crebillon. A French writer will hardly ever venture to represent this subject with mythological truth; namely, the murder as intentional, and executed at the command of the gods. Should Clytemnestra be described not as rejoicing in the success of her crime, but repentant and softened by her maternal love, her death, it is true, could no longer be supportable. But how does this apply to a crime perpetrated with so much premeditation? By such a transition to what is little, the whole significance of the dreadful example is lost.

As the French are in general better acquainted with the Romans than the Greeks, we might expect the Roman pieces of Voltaire to be more consistent, in a political point of view, with historical truth, than his Greek pieces are with the symbolical nature of mythology. This is only the case however in *Brutus*, the earliest of them, and the only one which can be said to be sensibly planned. Voltaire sketched this tragedy in England; he had learned from *Julius Cæsar* the effect which the publicity

of republican transactions is capable of producing on the stage, and he wished therefore to hold, in some degree, a middle course between Corneille and Shakspeare. The first act opens majestically; the catastrophe is brief but striking, and the principles of genuine freedom are uniformly pronounced with a flowing eloquence. Brutus himself, his son Titus, the ambassador of the king, and the chief of the conspirators, are admirably depicted. I am by no means disposed to censure the introduction of love into this play. The passion of Titus for a daughter of Tarquin, which constitutes the knot, is not improbable, and in its tone harmonizes with the manners which are depicted. Still less am I disposed to agree with La Harpe, when he says that Tullia ought to display proud and heroic sentiments, like Emilia in *Cinna*, to serve as a counterpoise to the republican virtues. By what means can a noble youth be more easily seduced than by female tenderness and modesty? It is not, generally speaking, natural that a being like Emilia should give rise to love.

The *Mort de César* is a mutilated tragedy: it ends with the speech of Antony over the dead body of César, borrowed from Shakspeare; that is, it has no conclusion. What a patched and bungling appearance it exhibits in all its parts! What a coarse-spun, hurried, and lame conspiracy! How stupid César must have been, had he allowed the conspirators to brave him before his face without suspecting anything of their design! That Brutus, although he knew César to be his father, nay, immediately after this came to his knowledge, should join in his assassination, is cruel, and, at the same time, highly unlike a Roman. History affords us many examples of fathers in Rome who condemned their own sons to death for crimes of state; the law gave fathers an unlimited power of life and death over their children in their own houses. But the murder of a father, though undertaken for the recovery of freedom, would have stamped the perpetrator, in the eyes of the Romans, as an unnatural monster. The inconsistencies which are here produced by the attempt to observe the unity of place, are obvious to the least discerning eye. The scene is said to be in the Capitol; here the conspiracy is formed in clear daylight, and César goes out and in during the time. But the people do not appear to know rightly themselves where they are; for César on one occasion exclaims, *Courons au Capitole!*

The same improprieties are repeated in *Catiline*, which is but a very little better than the preceding piece. From Voltaire's sentiments respecting the dramatic exhibition of a conspiracy, which I quoted in the foregoing Lecture, we might well conclude that, even if it were not evident that with the French sys-

tem a genuine representation of such a transaction is hardly possible, he was altogether unacquainted with its true nature; not only from the observance of the rules of place and time, but also on account of the dignity of poetical expression insisted on, which is incompatible with the accurate mention of particular circumstances, on which, however, the whole depends. The machinations of a conspiracy, and the endeavours to frustrate them, are like works under ground, in which the besiegers and besieged endeavour to blow one another up.—Something must be done to enable the spectators to comprehend the art of the miners. If Cataline and his adherents had employed no more art and dissimulation, and Cicero no more determined wisdom than Voltaire has given them, the one could not have endangered Rome, and the other could not have saved it. The piece turns always round on the same point; they all exclaim against one another, but no one acts; and at the conclusion the affair is decided as if by accident, by the blind chance of war. When we read the simple relation of Sallust, it has the appearance of the genuine poetry of the object, and Voltaire's work by the side of it looks like a piece of school rhetoric. Ben Jonson has treated the subject with a very different insight into the true connexion of human affairs; and Voltaire might have learned a great deal from the man whom he employed falsehoods in traducing.

The *Triumvirat* belongs to the attempts of his age which are generally allowed to have been unsuccessful. It consists of endless declamations on the subject of proscription, poorly supported by a mere show of action. Here we find the triumvirs quietly sitting in their tents on an island in the small river Rhene, during the raging of storms, earthquakes, and volcanoes; and Julia and the young Pompeius are shown as if shipwrecked on the strand, although they are travelling on terra firma; besides a number of other puerilities. Voltaire, probably by way of apology for the poor success which the piece had on its representation, says, "This piece is perhaps in the English taste."—Heaven forbid!

We return to the earlier tragedies of Voltaire, in which he brought on the stage subjects never before attempted, and on which his fame as a dramatic poet principally rests: *Zaire*, *Alzire*, *Mahomet*, *Semiramis*, and *Tancréd*.

Zaire is considered in France as the triumph of tragic poetry in the representation of love and jealousy. We will not assert with Lessing, that Voltaire was acquainted only with the *legal* style of love. He often expresses feeling with a fiery strength, if not with that familiar truth and *naïveté* in which an unreserved heart lays itself open. But I see no trace of the oriental colouring

in the mode of feeling of *Zaire*: educated in the seraglio, she should cling to the object of her passion with all the fervour of a maiden of a glowing imagination, rioting, as it were, in the fragrant perfumes of the East. Her fanciless love dwells solely in the heart; and how can we reconcile that with such an object? Orosman, on his part, lays claim indeed to European tenderness of feeling; but the Tartar is merely varnished over in him, and he has frequent relapses into his ungovernable fury and despotic habits. The poet ought at least to have given a credibility to the magnanimity which he ascribes to him, by investing him with a celebrated historical name, such as that of the Saracen monarch Saladin, well known for his nobleness and liberality of sentiment. But all our favour inclines to the oppressed Christian and chivalrous side, and the glorious name which it exhibits. What can be more affecting than the royal martyr Lusignan, the upright and pious Nerestan, who, in the fire of youth, confines his endeavours to the redemption of the associates of his belief? The scenes in which they appear are uniformly excellent, and more particularly the whole of the second act. The idea of connecting the discovery of a daughter with her conversion can never be sufficiently praised. But the great effect of this act is, in my opinion, injurious to the rest of the piece. Does any person seriously wish the union of *Zaire* with Orosman, except spectatresses who are flattered with the homage which is here paid to her beauty, or spectators who are still entangled in the follies of youth? Can the feeling of others go along with the poet, when *Zaire's* love, so ill justified by the act of the Sultan, balances in her soul the voice of blood, and the most sacred claims of filial duty, honour, and religion?

It was a meritorious daring (such singular prejudices then prevailed in France) to exhibit French heroes in *Zaire*. In *Alzire* Voltaire went still farther, and treated a subject in modern history never yet touched by his countrymen. In the former piece he contrasted the chivalrous and Saracenic way of thinking; in this we have Spaniards opposed to Peruvians. The difference between the old and new world has given rise to descriptions of a true poetical nature. However the action may be invented, I find in this piece more historical and more of what we may call symbolical truth, than in most French tragedies. Zamor is a representation of the savage in his free, and Montese in his subdued state; Guzman, of the arrogance of the conqueror; and Alvarez, of the mild influence of Christianity. *Alzire* remains between these conflicting elements in an affecting struggle betwixt attachment to her country, its manners, and the first choice of her heart, on the one part, and new bands of honour and duty

on the other. All human motives speak in favour of the love of *Alzire*, and against that of *Zaire*. The last scene, where the dying Guzman is dragged in, is beneficently overpowering. The noble lines on the diversity of religions, with which Zamor is converted by Guzman, are borrowed from an event in history: they are the words of the Duke of Guise to a protestant who wished to kill him; but the honour of the poet is not the less in applying them as he has done. In short, notwithstanding the improbabilities in the plot, which are easily discovered, and have often been censured, *Alzire* appears to me the most fortunate attempt, the most finished of all the compositions of Voltaire.

In *Mahomet*, the impurity of purpose has been dreadfully re-vengeed on the artist. He may affirm as much as he pleases that his intentions were solely directed against fanaticism; there can be no doubt that he wished to destroy the belief in any revelation, and that he considered every means allowable for that object. We have thus a work which is productive of effect; but an alarmingly painful effect, equally repugnant to humanity, philosophy, and religious feeling. The Mahomet of Voltaire makes two innocent young persons, a brother and a sister, who childishly adore him as a messenger from God, unconsciously murder their own father, and this from the motives of an incestuous love in which they had also become unknowingly entangled by his consent; the brother after he has blindly executed his horrible mission, he rewards with poison, and the sister he reserves for the gratification of his nauseous lust. This web of atrocities, this cold-blooded delight in wickedness, exceeds perhaps the measure of human nature; but, at all events, it exceeds the bounds of poetic exhibition, even though such a monster should ever have appeared in the course of ages. But, overlooking this, what a disfiguration, nay, even distortion, of history! He has stripped her of her wonderful charms; not a trace of oriental colouring is to be found. Mahomet was a false prophet, but most certainly an enthusiastic and inspired one, otherwise he would never have revolutionized the half of the world. What an absurdity to make him merely a cool deceiver! One alone of the many sublime maxims of the Koran would be sufficient to annihilate the whole of these incongruous inventions.

Semiramis is a motley patchwork of the French manner and mistaken imitation. It has something of *Hamlet*, and something of *Clytemnestra* and *Orestes*; but nothing of any of them as it ought to be. The love to an unknown son is borrowed from the *Semiramis* of Crebillon. The appearance of Ninus is a mixture of the Ghost in *Hamlet*, and the shadow of Darius in *Æschylus*. That it is superfluous has been admitted by the French critics

themselves. Lessing, with his raillery, has scared away the Ghost. With a great deal of abuse against the behaviour of ordinary ghosts, it has this peculiar to itself, that its speeches are dreadfully bombastic. Notwithstanding the great zeal displayed by Voltaire against subordinate love intrigues in tragedy, he has, however, contrived to exhibit two pairs of lovers, the *partie carrée* as it is called, in this play, which was to be the foundation of an entirely new species.

Since the *Cid* no French tragedy had appeared, of which the plot was founded on such pure motives of honour and love without any ignoble intermixtures, and so completely consecrated to the exhibition of chivalrous sentiments, as *Tancred*. *Amenaide*, though honour and life are at stake, disdains to exculpate herself by a declaration which would endanger her lover; and Tancred, though justified in esteeming her faithless, defends her in single combat, and seeks in despair the death of a hero, when the unfortunate error clears up. So far the piece is irreproachable, and deserving of the greatest praise. But it is weakened by other imperfections. It is of great detriment to its perspicuity, that we cannot at the very first hear the letter without superscription, which occasions all the embarrassment, and that it is not sent off before our eyes. The political disquisitions in the first act are tedious; Tancred appears in the third act for the first time, and he is impatiently expected to give animation to the scene. The furious imprecations of *Amenaide* at the conclusion are not in harmony with the deep but soft emotion with which we are overpowered by the re-union of two lovers, who have mistaken each other, in the moment of their separation by death.

It might be considered allowable in Voltaire in the earlier piece of the *Orphelin de la Chine* to represent the great Dschingis-kan in love. This drama ought to be called the *Conquest of China*, with the conversion of the cruel Khan of Tartary, &c. The whole of the interest is concentrated in two children whom we never once see. The Chinese are represented as the most virtuous and wise of all mankind, and overflow with philosophical maxims. As Corneille in his old age made one and all his characters politicians, Voltaire in like manner furnished out his with philosophy, and availed himself of them to preach up his favourite opinions. He was not deterred by the example of Corneille, when the power of representing the passions was extinguished, from bringing to light a number of weak and faulty productions.

Since the time of Voltaire the constitution of the French stage has remained nearly the same. No talent has yet arisen sufficiently powerful to advance the art a step farther, and to refute, by a victorious result their superannuated prejudices. Many at-

tempts have been made, but they generally follow in the track of what has already been done, without surpassing it. The endeavour to introduce more historical extent into dramatic composition is frustrated by the traditional limitations and restraints. Of the attacks both theoretical and practical which have been made in France itself on the prevailing system of rules, it will be the most suitable time to deliver a few observations when we review the present condition of the French stage, after considering their comedy and the other secondary kind of dramatic works; as attempts have either been made to found new species, or, in an arbitrary manner, to overturn the divisions which have hitherto been established between them.

LECTURE XI.

French Comedy.—Moliere.—Criticism of his works.—Scarron, Boursault, Regnard; Comedies in the time of the Regency; Marivaux and Destouches; Piron and Gresset.—Later attempts.—The heroic opera: Quinault.—Operettes and Vaudevilles.—Diderot's attempted change of the theatre.—The weeping drama.—Beaumarchais.—Melo-dramas.—Merits and defects of the histrionic art.

THE same system of rules and proprieties, which I have endeavoured to show must inevitably have a narrowing influence on tragedy, has been applied to comedy in France much more advantageously. For this mixed composition has, as we have already seen, an unpoetical side; and some degree of artificial constraint, if not altogether essential to the new comedy, is certainly beneficial to it; for if it is treated with too negligent a latitude, it runs a risk in respect of general structure, shapelessness, and representation of individual peculiarities, of falling into everyday common-place. In the French as well as the Grecian language, it happens that the same syllabic measure is used in tragedy and comedy, which on a first view may appear singular. But if the *Alexandrine* did not appear to us peculiarly adapted to the free imitative expression of pathos, on the other hand it must be owned, that a comical effect is produced by the application of so symmetrical a measure to the familiar turns of dialogue. The narrowing grammatical conscientiousness of the French poetry is fully suited to comedy, where the versification is not purchased at the expense of resemblance to the language of conversation, where it is not intended to elevate the dialogue by sublimity and dignity above real life, but merely to communicate to it a more elegant ease and lightness. Hence the opinion of the French, who hold a comedy in verse in much higher estimation than a comedy in prose, seems to me to admit of a good justification.

I endeavoured to show that the unities of place and time are inconsistent with the essence of many tragical subjects, because a comprehensive action is frequently carried on in distant places at the same time, and because great determinations can only be slowly prepared. This is not the case in comedy: here the intrigue ought to prevail, the activity of which quickly advances towards its object; and hence the unity of time comes to be almost naturally observed. The domestic and social circles in which the new comedy moves are usually assembled in one place,

and consequently the poet is not under the necessity of sending our imagination abroad: only it might have been as well, perhaps, not to interpret the unity of place so very strictly as not to allow the transition from one room to another, or to different houses of the same town. The choice of the scene on the street, a practice in which the Latin comic writers were frequently followed in the earlier times of modern comedy, is very irreconcilable with our way of living, and the more deserving of censure, as in the case of the ancients it was an inconvenience which arose from the construction of their theatre.

According to the French critics, and the opinion which has become prevalent through them, Molière alone of all their comic writers, is classical; and all that has been done since his time, is merely estimated as a more or less perfect approximation to this supposed pattern of an excellence which can never be surpassed, nor even equalled. Hence we shall first proceed to characterize this founder of the French comedy, and then give a short sketch of its progress after his time.

Molière has produced works in so many departments, and of such various worth, that we should hardly be enabled to recognize the same founder in all of them; and yet it is usual, when speaking of his peculiarities and merits, and the advance made by him in his art, to throw the whole of his labours into one mass.

Born and educated in an inferior rank, he enjoyed the advantage of becoming acquainted with the modes of living of the industrious part of the community* from his own experience, and of acquiring the talent of imitating low modes of expression.—At an after period, when Louis XIV. took him into his service, he had opportunities, although from a subordinate station, of narrowly observing the court. He was an actor, and it would appear of peculiar strength in overcharged and farcical comic parts; so little was he prepossessed with prejudices of personal dignity, that he renounced all the conditions by which it was accompanied, and was ever ready to deal out or to receive the blows which were then so frequent on the stage. Nay, his mimetic zeal went so far, that he actually drew his last breath in representing his imaginary patient, and became, in the truest sense, a martyr to the laughter of others. His business was to invent all manner of pleasant entertainments for the court, and by way of relaxation from his state affairs or warlike undertakings, to provoke “the greatest king of the world” to laughter. One would think, on

* *Bürgerliche Leben* (*bourgeois*).—I have translated this by a circumlocution: we have no privileged casts in this country, and consequently our language has no single expression equivalent to *bourgeois*, which includes, it is believed, all the unprivileged classes in cities and towns.—*Trans.*

the triumphant return from a glorious campaign, this might have been accomplished in a more refined manner than by the representation of the nauseous condition of an imaginary patient; but Louis XIV. was not so fastidious: he was very well contented with the buffoon whom he protected, and even exhibited his own elevated person occasionally in dances in his ballets. This external situation of Molière was the cause that many of his labours had their origin as mere occasional pieces in the commands of the court; and they bear accordingly the stamp of that origin. Without travelling out of France, he had opportunities of becoming acquainted with the *lazzis* of the Italian comic masks on the Italian theatre at Paris, where improvisatory dialogues were intermixed with scenes written in French: in the Spanish comedies he studied the ingenious complications of intrigue: Plautus and Terence taught him the salt of the Attic wit, the genuine tone of comic maxims, and nice delineations of character. All this he employed with more or less success in the exigency of the moment, and made use also of all manner of means foreign to his art, to dress out his drama in a sprightly and diversified manner: the allegorical acts of the opera prologues, musical intermezzos, in which he even introduced Italian and Spanish national music, with texts in their own language; at one time sumptuous, and at another grotesque ballets, and even sometimes mere vaulting. He knew how to draw advantage from everything: the censure passed upon his pieces, the defective manners of rival actors imitated to deception by himself and his company, and even the embarrassment in not being able to produce a theatrical entertainment so quickly as it was demanded by the king, all became for him a matter of amusement. His pieces borrowed from the Spanish, his pastorals and tragi-comedies merely calculated to please the eye, and three or four comedies besides of his earlier days, which are even versified, and consequently carefully laboured, the critics give up without more ado. But even in the farces with or without ballets and intermezzos, in which the overcharged, and frequently the self-conscious and arbitrary comic of buffoonery prevails, Molière has exhibited an inexhaustible store of good humour, scattered excellent jokes with a lavish hand, and drawn the most amusing caricatures with a bold and vigorous hand: all this, however, has been often done before his time, and I cannot see how in this department he can stand alone as a creative and altogether original artist. For example; is the braggadocio officer of Plautus less meritorious in grotesque characterization than the *bourgeois gentilhomme*? We shall immediately examine, in a brief manner, whether Molière has actually improved the pieces which he borrowed in whole or in part from Plautus and Terence. When

we bear in mind that in these Latin authors we have only a faint and faded copy of the new Attic comedy, we shall then be enabled to judge whether he would have been able to surpass its masters in case they had come down to us. Many of his inventions I am induced to suspect as borrowed, and I am convinced that we should discover the source were we to search into the antiquities of farcical literature.* Others are so obvious, and have so often been both used and abused, that they may in some measure be considered as the common good of comedy.—Such is the scene in the *Malade Imaginaire*, where the love of the wife is put to the test by the supposed death of the husband, an old joke which our *Hans Sachs* has handled drolly enough.† We have a declaration of Molière, from which it would appear that he entertained no very conscientious sentiments respecting plagiarism. In the undignified relations in which he lived, and in which everything was so much calculated for dazzling show, that his name did not even legally belong to him, we are the less to wonder at this.

When Molière in his farcical pieces did not lean on foreign invention, he however appropriated to himself the comic manner of other countries, and more particularly that of the Italian buffoonery. He wished to introduce a sort of masked characters without masks, who should ~~recur~~ *recur* with the same name. They have never however been able to become properly domiciliated in France; because the flexible national character of the French, which imitates every mode that is prevalent for the time, is incompatible with that odd originality of exterior to which humorous and singular individuals give themselves carelessly up in other nations, where all are not modelled by the social tone after the same manner. As the *Sganarelles*, *Mascarilles*, *Scapins*, and *Crispins*, have been allowed to retain their uniform, that everything like consistency may not be lost, they are now completely obsolete on the stage. The French taste is, generally speaking, very little inclined to the self-conscious, drolly-exaggerating, and arbitrary comic; because these descriptions of the comic speak more to the fancy than to the understanding. We

* The learned *Tiraboschi* (*Storia della Letteratura Italiana*, Lib. III. § 25.) attests this in very strong expressions:—"Molière," says he, "has made so much use of the Italian comic writers, that were we to take from him all that he has taken from others, the volumes of his comedies would be very much reduced in bulk."

† I know not whether it has been already remarked that the idea which constitutes the foundation of the *Marriage Forcé* is borrowed from *Rabelais*; in whom Panurge enters upon the very same consultation respecting his future marriage, and receives from Pantagruel just such a sceptical answer as Sganarelle does from the second philosopher.

do not mean to censure this, nor to quarrel about the respective merits of the different species. The low estimation in which the former are held may perhaps contribute the more to the success of the comic of observation. And in fact the French comic writers have here displayed a great deal of refinement and ingenuity: in this consists the great merit of Molière, and it is certainly very distinguished. We may only ask, whether it is of such a description as to justify the French critics, on account of half a dozen of regular comedies as they are called of Molière, in holding the whole of the stores of other nations in refined and characteristic delineation in such infinite contempt as they do, and in setting up him as the comic genius who has never been equalled.

If the praise bestowed by the French on their tragic writers be, from national vanity and ignorance of the mental productions of other nations, exceedingly extravagant, in their praise of Molière they express themselves also in a manner out of all proportion with the object. Voltaire calls him the father of genuine comedy; and this may be true enough with respect to France. According to La Harpe, comedy and Molière are synonymous terms; he is the first of all moral philosophers, his works are the school of the world. Chamfort calls him the most amiable teacher of humanity since Socrates; and is of opinion that Julius Cæsar who called Terence a half Menander, would have called Menander a half Molière.—I doubt this.

The kind of moral which we may in general expect from comedy I have already shown: it is morality in action, the art of life. In this respect the higher comedies of Molière contain many admirable observations happily expressed, which are still applicable; others are tainted with the narrowness of his own private opinions, or the opinions which were prevalent in his age. In this sense Menander was also a philosophical comic writer; and we may boldly place the moral maxims which remain of him by the side of those of Molière at the very least. But no comedy is constructed of mere sentences. The poet must be a moralist, but his personages cannot always be moralizing. And here Molière appears to me to have exceeded the bounds of propriety: he gives us in lengthened disquisitions the *pro* and *con* of the character exhibited by him; nay, he allows this to consist, in part, in principles for which the persons themselves combat against the attacks of others. This leaves us nothing to conjecture; and the highest refinement and delicacy of the comic of observation consists in this, that the characters disclose themselves unconsciously by traits which unvoluntarily escape from them. To this kind of comic the manner in which Oronte introduces his sonnet,

Orgon listens to the accounts respecting Tartuffe and his wife, and Vadius and Trissotin fall by the ears, undoubtedly belongs; but the endless disquisitions of Alceste and Philinte respecting the way in which we ought to view the falsity and corruption of the world do not in the slightest respect belong to it. They are serious, but still they cannot satisfy us as exhausting the subject; and as they are dialogues in which the characters are precisely at the same point at the end as when they began, they are defective in the necessary dramatic movement. Such argumentative disquisitions which lead to nothing are frequent in all the most admired pieces of Molière; and nowhere more than in the *Misanthrop*. Hence the action, which is also poorly invented, is found to drag so very much; for, with the exception of a few scenes of a more sprightly description, it consists altogether of discourses formally introduced and supported, of which the stagnation can only be concealed by the art employed on the details of versification and expression. In a word, these pieces are too didactic, too expressly instructive; whereas the spectator should only be instructed incidentally, and, as it were, without its appearing to have been intended.

Before we proceed to consider more particularly the productions which properly belong to the poet himself, and are acknowledged as master-pieces, we shall offer a few observations on his imitations of the Latin comic writers.

The most celebrated is the *Avare*.—The manuscripts of the *Aulularia* of Plautus are unfortunately mutilated towards the end; but yet we find enough in them to excite our admiration. Molière has merely borrowed a few scenes and jokes from this play; for his plot is altogether different. In Plautus it is extremely simple: his Miser has found a treasure, which he anxiously watches and conceals. The suit of a rich bachelor for his daughter excites a suspicion in him that his wealth is known. The preparations for the wedding bring strange servants and cooks into his house; he considers his gold pot no longer secure, and conceals it out of doors, which gives an opportunity to a slave of her lover, sent out with the knowledge of the daughter, to steal it. Without doubt the thief must afterwards have been obliged to make restitution, otherwise the piece would end in too melancholy a manner with the lamentations and imprecations of the old man. The knot of the love intrigue is easily untied: the young man, who had too soon assumed the rights of the marriage state, is the nephew of the bridegroom, who willingly renounces in his favour. All the events serve merely to lead the miser, by a series of agitations and alarms gradually heightened, to the situation in which his miserable passion is unfolded. Mo-

lière again, without attaining this object, puts a complicated machine in motion. Here we have a lover of the daughter, who, disguised as a servant, flatters the avarice of the old man; a prodigal son who courts the bride of his father; intriguing servants; an usurer; and after all a discovery at the end. The love intrigue is spun out in a very clumsy and everyday manner; and it has the effect of making us at different times lose sight altogether of Harpagon. Several scenes of a good comic description are merely subordinate, and do not necessarily arise out of the thing itself in the true manner of an artist. Molière has accumulated as it were all kinds of avarice in one person; and yet the miser who buries his treasures and he who lends on pledge can hardly be the same. Harpagon starves his coach horses: but why has he any? This applies only to a man who, with a disproportionately small income, wishes to keep up the appearance of a certain rank. Comic characterization would soon be at an end were there really only one character of the miser. The most important deviation of Molière from Plautus is, that the one merely paints a person who watches over his treasure, and the other makes his miser in love. The love of an old man is in itself an object of ridicule; the anxiety of a miser is no less so. We may easily see that when we unite with avarice, which separates a man from others and withdraws him within himself, the sympathetic and liberal passion of love, the union must give rise to the most harsh contrasts. Avarice, however, is usually a very good preservative against falling in love. Where then is the more refined characterization; and as such a wonderful noise is made about it, where shall we find the most valuable moral instruction? Whether in Plautus or in Molière? A miser and a superannuated lover may both be present at the representation of Harpagon, and both return from the theatre satisfied with themselves, while the miser says to himself, "I am at least not in love;" and the lover, "Well, at all events I am not a miser." High comedy represents those follies, however striking they may be, which are reconcilable with the ordinary course of things; whatever forms a singular exception, and can only be conceivable in an utter perversion of ideas, belongs to the arbitrary exaggeration of farce. Hence since the time of Molière (and the same thing was undoubtedly the case long before him), the enigmatical and avaricious old man has been the peculiar commonplace of the Italian masked comedy and *opera buffa*, to which in truth it certainly belongs. Molière has treated the main incident, the theft of the chest of gold, with an uncommon degree of unskilfulness. At the very beginning Harpagon, in a scene borrowed from Plautus, is suspicious lest a servant may not have

discovered his treasure. After this he forgets it; for four whole acts there is not a word about it, and the spectator drops as it were from the clouds when the servant all at once brings in the stolen coffer; for we have no information as to the manner in which he fell upon the treasure which was so carefully concealed. Here Plautus has shown a great deal of ingenuity: the excessive anxiety of the old man for his pot of gold, and all that he does to save it, are the very cause of its loss. The subterraneous treasure is always invisibly present; it is as it were the evil spirit which drives its keeper to madness. In all this we have a moral which is calculated to produce a very different impression. In the monologue of Harpagon after the theft, the modern poet has introduced the most incredible exaggerations. The calling out to the pit to discover the theft, which when well acted produces so great an effect, is a trait of the old comedy of Aristophanes, and may serve to give us some idea of its powers of entertainment.

The *Amphitryon* are hardly anything more than a free imitation of the Latin original. The whole plan and order of the scenes are retained. The waiting-woman, or wife of Sosia, is the invention of Moliere. The parody of the marriage history of the master in that of the servant is ingenious, and gives rise to the most amusing investigations on the part of Sosia to find out whether, during his absence, such a domestic blessing as that of *Amphitryon* may not have also been conferred on him. The revolting coarseness of the old mythological story is refined as much as can possibly be done without injury to its spirit and boldness, and the execution is in general extremely elegant. The uncertainty of the persons respecting their own identity and duplication is founded on a sort of comic metaphysics: the considerations of Sosia respecting his two I, which have cudgelled each other, may in reality furnish materials for thinking to our philosophers of the present day.

The most unsuccessful of Moliere's imitations of the ancients is that of *Phormio* in the *Fourberies de Scapin*. The whole plot is borrowed from Terence, and, with the addition of another discovery to that which he found, well or ill adapted, or rather tortured, to a consistency with modern manners. The poet has indeed gone very hurriedly to work with this plot, which he has patched together in a most negligent manner. The tricks of Scapin, for the sake of which he has spoiled the plot, occupy the first place: but we may well ask whether they deserve it. The Grecian Phormio, a man who, for the sake of feasting with young companions, lends himself to all sorts of hazardous tricks, is an interesting and modest knave; Scapin directly the reverse. He had no cause to boast so much of his tricks; they are so stupidly

planned, that in justice they ought not to have succeeded. Even supposing the two old men to be obtuse and brainless in the extreme, we can hardly conceive how they could so easily fall into such an obvious and clumsy snare. It is also disgustingly improbable that Zerbinette, who as a gipsy ought to have known how to conceal knavish tricks, should run out into the street and tell the first unknown person whom she meets, who happens to be Geronte himself, the deceit practised upon him by Scapin. The farce of the sack into which Scapin makes Geronte to crawl, then bears him off, and cudgels him as if by the hand of strangers, is altogether a most unsuitable excrescence. Boileau was therefore well warranted in reproaching Moliere with having shamelessly allied Terence to Taburin, (the merry-andrew of a mountebank.) In reality, Moliere has here for once borrowed, not from the Italian masks, which was frequently the case with him, but from the Pagliasses of the rope-dancers and vaulters. We must not forget that the *Cheats of Scapin* is one of the latest works of the poet. This and several others of the same period, as *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*, *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*, and even his last, the *Malade Imaginaire*, sufficiently prove that the maturity of his mind as an artist did not increase with the progress of years, otherwise he would have been disgusted with such loose productions, and that frequently he brought forth pieces with great levity and haste when he had full leisure to think of posterity. If he occasionally subjected himself to stricter rules, we owe it more to his ambition and his desire to be numbered among the classical writers of the golden age than to any internal and growing aspiration after the highest excellence.

The high claims of the French critics for the favourite, which we have already mentioned, are principally founded on the *Ecole des Femmes*, *Tartuffe*, *Le Misanthrope*, and *Les Femmes Savantes*; pieces which are finished with great diligence. We must expressly state in the outset, that we leave the separate beauties of language and versification altogether to the decision of native critics. These merits can only be subordinate requisites; and the undue stress which is laid in France on the manner in which a piece is written and versified has, in our opinion, been both in tragedy and comedy injurious to the developement of other, more essential requisites of the dramatic art. We shall confine our observations entirely to the general spirit and plan of these comedies.

The earliest of these, *L'Ecole des Femmes*, seems to me also the most excellent; it is the one in which there is the greatest display of vivacious humour, rapidity, and comic strength. A man arrived at an age unsuitable for wedlock, who purposely

educates a young girl in ignorance and simplicity, that he may preserve her faithful to him, while everything turns out the reverse of his expectations, was not a new invention: a short while before Molière it had been related by Scarron, who derived it from a Spanish novel. Still however it was a lucky thought to labour this subject for the stage, and the execution is most masterly. Here we have a real and very interesting plot; no creeping investigations; all the matter is of one piece, without foreign levers and accidental intermixtures, with the exception of the catastrophe, which is brought about, by means of a discovery, in a manner somewhat arbitrarily. The *naïve* confessions and innocent devices of Agnes are full of sweetness; they form, with the unguarded confidence reposed by the young lover in his unknown rival, and the stifled rage of the old man against both, a series of comic scenes of the most amusing, and at the same time of the most refined description.

As an example how little the violation of certain probabilities diminish our pleasure, we may remark that Molière, with respect to the choice of scene, has here indulged in very great liberties. We will not inquire how Arnolph frequently happens to converse with Agnes in the street or in an open place, while he keeps her at the same time so carefully locked up. But when Horace does not know Arnolph as the intended husband of his mistress, and betrays everything to him, this can only be admissible from Arnolph's passing with her by another name. Horace ought therefore to inquire for Arnolph in his own house in a remote quarter, and not before the door of his mistress where he always finds him, without entertaining any suspicion from that circumstance. Why do the French critics set such a high value on similar probabilities in the dramatic art, when they must be compelled to admit that their best masters have not always observed them?

Tartuffe is an exact picture of pious hypocrisy held up for a warning to every man; it is an excellent serious satire, but with the exception of separate scenes it is not a comedy. It is generally admitted that the catastrophe is bad, as it is brought about by a foreign lever. It is bad, too, because the danger which Orgon runs of being driven from his house and cast into prison is by no means such an embarrassment as his blind confidence actually merited. Here the serious purpose of the work is openly disclosed, and the praise of the king is a dedication by which the poet, even in the piece itself, humbly recommends himself to the protection of his majesty from the persecutions which he dreaded.

In the *Femmes Savantes* raillery has also the upper hand of mirth; the action is insignificant and not in the least attractive; and the catastrophe, after the manner of Molière, is introduced in

a foreign and arbitrary manner. Yet these technical imperfections we might well excuse for the sake of satirical merit. But in this respect the composition, from the limited nature of its views, is extremely partial. We are not to expect from the comic poet that he should always, along with the exhibition of a folly, give us a representation of the opposite reasonable way of thinking; in this way he would announce his object of instructing us in too methodical a manner. Two opposite follies may be exhibited together in an equally ludicrous manner. Molière has here ridiculed the affectation of a false taste, and the vain-gloriousness of empty knowledge. Proud in their own ignorance and contempt for all higher cultivation, they certainly deserve the ridicule bestowed on them; but that which in this comedy is portrayed as the correct way of thinking falls very nearly into the same error. All the reasonable persons of the piece, the father and his brother, the lover and the daughter, nay, even the ungrammatical maid, are all proud of what they neither are, nor have, nor know, nor seek to be, to have, or to know. The limited view which Chrysale takes of the female destination, the opinion of Clitander on the inutility of learning, and in other places the sentiments respecting the measure of cultivation and knowledge which is suitable to a man of rank, were all intended to convey to us the opinions of Molière himself on these subjects. We may here trace a vein of a certain valet-de-chambre morality, which also makes its appearance in him on many other points. We can easily conceive how his education and situation should lead him to entertain such ideas; but they are hardly such as entitle him to read lectures on human society. That Trissotin at the end should be ignominiously made to commit an act of low selfishness is odious; for we know that a learned man then alive was satirized under this character, and that his name was very slightly disguised. The vanity of an author is rather a preservative against this weakness: there are much more lucrative careers than that of authorship for selfishness without a feeling of honour.

The *Misanthrope*, which, as is well known, was at first coldly received, is still less amusing than the two preceding pieces: the action is less rapid, or rather there is none at all; and the meagre incidents which give only an apparent life to the dramatic movement; the quarrel with Oronte respecting the sonnet, and its adjustment; the decision of the law-suit which is always brought forward; the unmasking of Celimene through the vanity of the two Marquisses and the jealousy of Arsinoë; these incidents have no connexion with one another. Besides all this, the general plot is not even probable. It is framed with a view to exhibit the thorough delineation of a character; but a character discloses

itself much more in its relations with others than immediately. How comes Alceste to have chosen Philinte for a friend, a man whose principles were directly the reverse of his own? How comes he also to be enamoured of a coquette, who has nothing amiable in her character, and who entertains us merely by her scandal? We might well say, without exaggeration, that there is not one good point in the whole composition of this Celimene. In a character like that of Alceste, love is not a fleeting sensual impulse, but a serious feeling arising out of a want of a sincere mental union. His dislike of flattering falsehood and malicious scandal, which always characterize the conversation of Celimene, breaks forth so incessantly, that the first moment he ever heard her open her lips ought to have banished him from her for ever. Finally, the subject is ambiguous, and that is its greatest fault. The limits within which Alceste is in the right and beyond which he is in the wrong, it would be no easy matter to fix, and I am afraid the poet did not here see very clearly himself. He everywhere however paints Philinte, with his illusory justifications of the way of the world, and his phlegmatic resignation, as the intelligent and amiable man. Alceste is most decidedly in the right in the case of the elegant Celimene, and only in the wrong in the inconceivable weakness of his conduct towards her: he is in the right in his complaints of the corruption of the social constitution; the facts at least which he adduces are disputed by nobody. He is in the wrong in delivering his sentiments with so much violence, and at an unreasonable time; but as he cannot prevail on himself to assume the dissimulation which is necessary to be well received in the world, he is perfectly in the right in preferring solitude to society. Rousseau has already censured the ambiguity of the piece, by which what is deserving of approbation seems to be turned into ridicule. His opinion was not altogether unprejudiced; for his own character, and his behaviour towards the world, had a striking similarity to that of Alceste; besides, he mistakes the essence of dramatic composition, and founds his condemnation on examples of an accidentally false direction.

So far with respect to the famed moral philosophy of Molière in his pretended master-piece. From what has been stated, I consider myself warranted to pronounce, in opposition to the prevailing opinion, that Molière succeeded best with the coarse and homely comic, and that both his talent and his inclination would have altogether determined him to the composition of farces such as he continued to write even to the very end of his life. He seems always to have whipped himself up as it were to his more serious pieces in verse: we discover something of constraint in both plot and execution. His friend Boileau probably communi-

cated to him his view of a correct mirth, of a grave and decorous laughter; and so Molière determined, after the carnival of his farces, to accommodate himself occasionally to the spare diet of the regular taste, and to unite what in their own nature are irreconcilable, namely, dignity and drollery. However, we find even in his prosaical pieces traces of that didactical and satirical vein which is peculiarly foreign to comedy; for example, in his constant attacks on physicians and lawyers, in his disquisitions respecting the true tone of society, &c., the intention of which is actually to censure, to refute, to instruct, and not merely to afford entertainment.

The classical reputation of Molière preserves his pieces on the stage,* although in tone and manners they are altogether obsolete. This is a danger to which the comic poet is inevitably exposed from the side on which his composition does not rest on a poetical foundation, but is determined by the prose of external reality. The originals of the individual portraits of Molière have long since disappeared. The comic poet who lays claim to immortality must, in the delineation of character and the disposition of his plan, rest principally on those motives which are always intelligible, as they are not taken from the manners of any particular age, but from human nature itself.

In addition to Molière we have to notice but a few older contemporary comedies.—Of Corneille, who acquired a name from the imitation of Spanish comedies before he was known as a tragic author, only one piece keeps possession of the stage, *Le Menteur*, from Lope de Vega; and even this betrays, in our opinion, no comic talent. The poet accustomed to stilts, moves awkwardly in a species of the drama, the first requisites of which are sweetness and ease. *Scarron*, who only understood burlesque, has displayed this talent or knack in several comedies taken from the Spanish, of which two, *Jodelle*, or the *Servant turned Master*, and *Don Japhet of Armenia*, have till within these few years been occasionally acted at carnival farces, and have always been

* If they were not in possession of the stage, the indecency of a number of the scenes would cause many of them to be rejected, as the public of the present day, though probably not less corrupted than that of those times, is passionately fond of throwing over everything a cloak of morality. When a piece of Molière is acted, the head theatre of Paris is generally a downright solitude, if no particular circumstance brings the spectators together. Since these Lectures were held, *George Dandin* has been hissed at Paris, to the great grief of the critical watchmen of Zion. This was probably not on account of mere indecency. Whatever may be said in defence of the morality of the piece, the prerogatives of the higher classes are favoured in a very revolting manner in it; and it concludes with the shameless triumph of arrogance and depravity over plain honesty.

very successful. The plot of *Jodelle*, which belongs to Don Francisco de Roxas, is excellent; the style and the additions of Scarron have not been altogether able to disfigure it. All that is coarse, nauseous, and repugnant to taste, belongs to the French writer of the age of Louis XIV., who in his day was not without celebrity; for the Spanish work is throughout characterized by a spirit of tenderness. The burlesque tone, which in many languages may be tolerated, has been properly rejected by the French, for whenever it is not guided by judgment and taste, it sinks to disgusting vulgarity. *Don Japhet* represents in a still ruder manner the mystification of a coarse fool. The original belongs to the kind which the Spaniards call *comedias de figuron*: it has undoubtedly been also spoiled by Scarron. The worst of the matter is, that his exaggerations are trifling without being amusing.

Racine fell upon a very different plan of imitation from that which was then followed, in his *Plaideurs*, the idea of which he derived from Aristophanes. The piece in this respect stands alone. The action is merely a light piece of legerdemain; but the follies which he portrays belong to a circle, and, with the imitations of the officers of court and advocates, form a complete whole. Many lines are at once witty sallies and characteristic traits; and some of the jokes have that apparently aimless drolery, which genuine comic inspiration can alone inspire. Racine would have become a dangerous rival of Molière, if he had continued to exercise the talent which he has here displayed.

Some of the comedies of a younger contemporary, and opponent of Molière, *Boursault*, have still kept possession of the stage; they are all of a secondary description, which the French call *pièces a tiroir*, and of which Molière gave the first example in his *Facheux*. This kind, from the accidental nature of the scenes, which are strung together on one common occasion, bear in so far a resemblance to the *mimi* of the ancients; they ought also to have it in the accurate imitation of individual peculiarities. These subjects are particularly favourable for the display of the mimic art in the more limited signification of the word, as the same player always appears in a different disguise, and assumes a new character. It is advisable not to extend such pieces beyond one act, as the want of dramatic movement, and the uniformity of the cause throughout all the different changes, are very apt to excite impatience. *Boursault's* pieces, which are not without their merit, are tediously spun out to five acts. The idea of exhibiting *Æsop*, a sage born a slave and deformed in person, as in possession of court favour, was original and happy. But in the two pieces, *Æsop in the City*, and *Æsop at Court*, the fables which are tacked to every important scene are drowned in diffuse

morals; they are altogether distinct from the dialogue, instead of being interwoven with it like the fable of Menenius Agrippa in Shakspeare; and modern manners do not suit with this childish mode of instruction. In the *Mercure Galant* all sorts of out of the way beings bring their petitions to the writer of a weekly paper. This thought and many of the most entertaining details have, if I am not mistaken, been borrowed by a favourite German author without acknowledgment.

A considerable time elapsed after the death of Molière before the appearance of *Regnard*, to whom the second place in comedy is usually assigned. He was a sort of adventurer who, after roaming a long time up and down the world, fell to the trade of a dramatic writer, and divided himself betwixt the Italian theatre which still continued to flourish under Gherardi, and for which he sketched the French scenes, and the composition of regular comedies in verse. The *Joueur*, his first play, is justly preferred to the others. The author was acquainted with this passion, and the way of living of gamesters, from his own experience: it is a picture after nature, with strongly drawn features, executed without exaggeration; and the plot and accessory circumstances are all appropriate and in character, with the exception of a pair of caricatures which might have been dispensed with. The *Distrain* possesses not only the faults of the methodical pieces of character which I have already censured, but it is no peculiar character; the mistakes occasioned by the unfortunate habit of being absent in thought are all alike, and admit of no heightening: they might therefore have filled up an afterpiece, but certainly did not merit the distinction of being spun out into a comedy of five acts. Regnard has done little more than dramatize a series of anecdotes which La Bruyere had assembled together under the name of a certain character. The execution of the *Legataire Universel* shows more comic talent; but from the error of the general plan, arising out of a want of moral feeling, this talent is completely thrown away. La Harpe declares this piece the *chef-d'œuvre* of comic pleasantry. It is, in fact, such a subject for pleasantry as would move a stone to pity; as enlivening as the grin of a death's head. What a subject for mirth? A feeble old man in the jaws of death, who is teased by young profligates for his property, and who has a false will imposed on him while he is lying insensible, as is believed, on his death-bed. If it is true that these scenes have always given rise to much laughter on the French stage, it only proves the spectators to possess the same unfeeling levity which disgust us in the author. We have elsewhere shown that, with an apparent indifference, a moral respect is essential to the comic poet, as the impressions which he

wishes to produce are inevitably destroyed whenever disgust or compassion is excited.

Legrand the actor, a contemporary of Regnard, was one of the first comic poets who acquired celebrity in afterpieces in verse, a species in which the French have since produced a number of elegant trifles. He has not however risen to anything like the same posthumous fame as Regnard; La Harpe dismisses him with very little ceremony. Yet we should be disposed to rank him very high as an artist had he composed nothing else than the King of Lubberlyland (*Le Roi de Cocagne*), a sprightly farce in the wonderful style, overflowing with what is very rare in France, a native fanciful wit, animated by the most lively mirth, which, although carried the length of the most frolicsome giddiness, sports on and about all subjects with the utmost harmlessness. We might call it an elegant and ingenious piece of madness; an example of the manner in which the drama of Aristophanes, or rather that of Eupolis,* who had also dramatized the tale of Lubberlyland, might be brought on our stage without exciting disgust, and without personal satire. And yet Legrand was certainly unacquainted with the old comedy, and his own 'genius (we make no scruple of using this expression) led him to the invention. The execution is as careful as in a regular comedy; but to this title in the French opinion it can have no pretensions from the wonderful world which is represented to us, from several of the decorations, and from the music here and there introduced. The French critics show themselves in general indifferent or unjust towards every suggestion of genuine fancy. Before they can entertain respect for a work it must bear a certain appearance of labour and effort. Among a giddy and light-minded people they have appropriated to themselves the post of honour of pedantry: they confound the levity of jocularity, which is quite compatible with profundity in art, with the levity arising from shallowness, which, as a natural gift or natural defect, is so frequent among their countrymen.

The eighteenth century has produced a number of comic writers in France of the second and third rank, but no distinguished genius capable of advancing the art a step farther, by which means the belief in the unapproachable excellence of Molière has become still more firmly riveted. As we have not room at present to go through all the separate productions, we shall premise a few observations respecting the general spirit of French comedy before entering on the consideration of the writers whom we have not yet mentioned.

* See p. 125.

The want of easy progress, and lengthened disquisitions in stationary dialogue, have characterized more or less every writer since the time of Molière, on whose regular pieces the conventional rules applicable to tragedy have had an indisputable influence. French comedy in verse has its tirades as well as tragedy; and this circumstance contributed to the introduction of a certain degree of stiff etiquette. The comedy of other nations has generally descended, from motives which we can be at no loss in understanding, into the circle of the inferior classes; but the French comedy is usually confined to the upper classes of society. Here also we trace the influence of the court as the central point of the whole national vanity. Those spectators, who in reality had no access to the great world, were flattered by being surrounded on the stage with Marquisses and Chevaliers, and while the poet satirized the fashionable follies, he endeavoured to snatch something of that privileged tone which was so much the object of envy. Society rubs off the salient angles of character; its peculiar entertainment consists in the detection of the ridiculous, and hence we acquire the faculty of being upon our guard against the observations of others. The natural, cordial, and jovial comic of the inferior classes is laid aside, and another description, the fruit of polished society, and bearing the stamp of the insipidity of such an aimless way of living, comes to be substituted in its stead. The object of these comedies is no longer life but society, that perpetual negotiation between conflicting vanities which never ends in a sincere treaty of peace: the embroidered dress, the hat under the arm, and the sword by the side, essentially belong to them, and the whole of the characterization is limited to the folly of the men and the coquetry of the women. The insipid uniformity of these pictures was unfortunately too often seasoned by the corruption of moral principles which, more especially after the age of Louis XIV. till beyond the middle of the century, under the regency and the government of Louis XV., it became the fashion openly to avow. In this period the favourite of the women, the *homme à bonnes fortunes*, who in the tone of satiety boasts of the multitude of conquests too easily accomplished by him, was not a character invented by the comic writers, but a portrait accurately taken from real life, as is proved by many memoirs of the foregoing century, even down to those of a Besenval. We are disgusted with the unveiled sensuality of the love intrigues of the Grecian comedy; but the Greeks would have found the love intrigues with married women in the French comedy, entered into merely from giddy vanity, much more disgusting. Limits have been fixed by nature herself to sensual excess; but when vanity assumes the part of a sensuality already deadened and enervated,

it gives birth to the most hollow corruption. If in the constant ridicule of marriage by the *petit-maitres*, and in their moral scepticism especially with regard to women, it was the intention of the poets to censure a prevailing depravity, the picture is not on that account the less dangerous. The great or fashionable world, which in point of numbers is the small, but which considers itself as alone of any importance, can hardly be improved by it; and the example is but too seductive for the other classes from the brilliancy with which the characters are surrounded. But in so far as comedy is concerned this deadening corruption is by no means entertaining; and in many pieces, in which fools of quality give the tone, for example in the *Chevalier a la mode* of *Dancourt*, the picture of complete moral dissoluteness which, although true, is both unpoetical and unnatural, is not merely productive of *ennui* but of the most decided repugnance and disgust.

From the number of writers to whom this charge chiefly applies, *Destouches* and *Marivaux*, fruitful or at least diligent comic poets, the former in verse, and the latter in prose, deserve to be excepted. They acquired considerable distinction among their contemporaries in the first half of the eighteenth century, but few of their works survived either of them on the stage. *Destouches* was a moderate, tame, and well-meaning author, who applied himself with all his powers to the composition of regular comedies, which were always drawn out to the length of five acts, and in which, with the exception of vivacity displayed by *Lisette* and her lover, *Frontin*, or *Pasquin*, in virtue of their situation, there is nothing of a laughable description. He was not in any danger, from an access of frolicsome petulance, of falling from the dignified tone of the supposed high comic into the familiarity of farce, which the French hold in such contempt. With moderate talents, without humour, almost without vivacity, neither ingenious in invention, nor possessed of a deep insight into the human mind and human affairs, he has in some of his productions, *Le Glorieux*, *Le Philosophi Marié*, and especially *L'Indecis*, with great credit to himself, given an example of what true and unpretending diligence is capable of effecting. Other pieces, for instance, *L'Ingrat* and *L'Homme Singulier*, are complete failures, in which we may see that a poet who considers *Tartuffe* and the *Misanthrope* as the highest objects of imitation, and this was evidently the case with *Destouches*, has only another step to take to lose sight of the comic art altogether. These two works of *Molière* have not been friendly lights to his followers, but real impediments in their way. Whenever a comic poet in his preface worships the *Misanthrope* as a model, I can immediately tell the result of his labours. For the dull and conditional

seriousness of prosaic life, and for prosaical applications stamped with the respectful name of moral, he will have sacrificed everything like frolicsome inspiration, and all true poetical entertainment.

That Marivaux is a mannerist is so universally acknowledged in France, that the peculiar term of *marivaudage* has been invented for his manner. But this manner is at least his own, and at first sight by no means unpleasing. Delicacy of mind cannot be denied to Marivaux, only it is coupled with a certain littleness. We have stated it to be the most refined kind of the comic of observation, when a peculiarity of property appears most conspicuous at the very time its possessor has the least suspicion of it, or is most studious to conceal it. Marivaux has applied this to the passions; and *naïveté* in the involuntary disclosure of emotions certainly belongs to the comic sphere. But then this *naïveté* is prepared by him in too artful a manner, appears too solicitous for our favour, and we may almost say seems too well pleased with itself. It is the game of hide and seek of children, who cannot keep quiet in their corner, but will always be popping out their heads, when they are not immediately discovered; nay sometimes, which is still worse, it is like the squinting through a fan held up from affected modesty. In Marivaux we always see his aim from the very beginning, and the whole of our attention is directed to the way by which he is to lead us to it. This would be a skilful mode of composing, if it did not degenerate into the unimportant and the superficial. Petty inclinations are strengthened by petty motives, exposed to petty probations, and brought by petty steps nearer and nearer to the conclusion. The whole generally turns on a declaration of love, and all sorts of clandestine means are tried to elicit it, or every kind of slight allusion is hazarded to hasten it. Marivaux has neither painted characters, nor contrived intrigues. The whole plot is generally an unpronounced word, which is always at the tongue's end, and which is frequently kept back in a pretty arbitrary manner. He is so uniform in his motives, that when we have read one of his pieces with a tolerable degree of attention we know all of them. Still however we must rank him above the herd of stiff imitators; something is even to be learned from him, as he possessed a peculiar though a very limited manner of viewing the essence of comedy.

Two other separate works are named as master-pieces in regular comedy in verse, belonging to two writers who here perhaps have taken more pains, but who have given a freer scope to their natural talent in other departments: the *Metromanie* of Piron and the *Mechant* of Gresset. The *Metromanie* is not

without humorous inspiration. In the young man possessed with a rage for poetry, Piron was desirous in some measure of painting himself: but as we always go tenderly to work in the ridicule of ourselves, along with the amiable weakness in question, he exhibits in his hero talents, magnanimity, and good heartedness. But this tender regard is not peculiarly favourable for comic strength. The *Mechant* is one of those gloomy comedies which might rapturously be hailed by a Timon as serving to confirm him in his aversion to human society, but which on social and cheerful minds can only be productive of the most painful effects. Why paint a dark and odious disposition, which, destitute of all human feelings, feeds its vanity in a cold contempt and derision of everything, and which is solely occupied in aimless detraction? Why exhibit such a moral deformity, which could hardly be tolerated even in tragedy, for the mere purpose of producing domestic discontent and petty embarrassments?

Yet, according to the decision of the French critics, these three comedies, the *Glorieux*, the *Metromanie*, and the *Mechant*, are all that the eighteenth century can oppose to Moliere. We should be disposed to rank the *Old Bachelor* of the late *Collin d'Harleville* much higher; but for this true picture of manners there is no scale in the works of Moliere, and it can only be compared with those of Terence. We have here the most happy union of the utmost refinement and accuracy in character, with the interest which we derive from an ably contrived plot; and a certain mildness of sentiment is diffused over the whole.

After a few observations on the secondary species of the *opera*, the *operette* and the *vaudeville*, we shall conclude with a view of the present condition of the French stage with reference to the histrionic art.

In the serious, heroic, or rather the ideal *opera*, if we may so express ourselves, we can only mention one poet of the age of Louis XIV. *Quinault*, who is now little read, but who is deserving of high praise. Boileau at an early period satirized him as a tragic poet; but he was afterwards highly successful in another species, that of the musical drama. Mazarin had introduced into France the taste for the Italian opera; Louis was also desirous of rivalling or surpassing foreign countries in the external magnificence of the drama, in decoration, machinery, music, and dancing; they were to be employed in the celebration of the court festivals; and hence Moliere was employed to write gay operas, and Quinault serious operas, for the music of Lulli. I am not sufficiently travelled in the earlier literature of the Italian opera to be able to speak with accuracy, but I suspect that here also Quinault laboured more after Spanish than Italian models; and

more particularly, that he derived from the festal dramas of Calderon the general form of his operas, and the allegorical allusions which are often to be found in them. It is true, poetical ornament is much more sparingly dealt out, as the whole is necessarily shortened for the sake of the music, and the very nature of the French language and versification is incompatible with the splendid magnificence, the luxurious fulness, displayed by Calderon. But the operas of Quinault are in their easy progress, truly fanciful; and the serious operas, in my opinion, cannot be stripped of the charm of the wonderful without becoming at length wearisome. In so far as the definition of his department is concerned, Quinault appears to me to have taken a much better road than that which Metastasio travelled long after him. The latter has admirably provided for the wants of a melodious music solely expressive of feeling; but where does he furnish the least food for the imagination? I am not so sure whether Quinault is justly entitled to praise for sacrificing, in compliance with the taste of his countrymen, everything like comic intermixture. He has been censured for a play on language in the expression of feeling. But is it just to exact the severity of the tragical cothurnus in light works of this description? Why should not Poetry be also allowed her arabesque? No person can be more an enemy to mannerism than I am; but we ought first to understand the degree of nature and truth which we have a right to expect from each species, and which is alone compatible with it. The verses of Quinault have no other *naïveté* and simplicity than those of the madrigal; and though they occasionally fall into the luscious, at other times they express a languishing tenderness with sweetness and the softest melody. The opera ought to resemble the enchanted gardens of Armida, of which Quinault says,

Dans ces lieux enchantés la volupté preside.

We ought only to be awaked out of the voluptuous dreams of feeling to enjoy the magical illusions of fancy. When we once, instead of real men, imagine beings whose only language is song, the gradation is very short to represent to ourselves creatures whose only employment is love; that feeling which hovers between the sensible and intellectual world; and the first invention is rendered natural by means of the second.

Quinault has had no successors. How far the French operas of the present day are below his both in point of invention and execution! The heroic and tragic have been insisted on in a department where they cannot produce their proper effect. Instead of handling mythological materials or subjects taken from

chivalrous or pastoral romances with fanciful freedom, they have chained themselves down to history in the manner of tragedy, and by means of their heavy seriousness, and the pedantry of their rules, they have so managed matters, that Dulness with leaden sceptre presides over the opera. The deficiencies of their music, the unfitness of the French language for composition in a style anything higher than that of the most simple national melodies, the unaccented and arbitrary nature of their recitative, the bawling bravura of the singers, we leave to the animadversions of musical critics.

With pretensions a great deal lower the *comic opera* or *opérette* approaches much more nearly to perfection. With respect to the composition, it may and indeed ought to assume only a national tone. The transition from song to speech, without any musical accompaniment or heightening, which was censured by Rousseau as an unsuitable mixture of two modes of composition, may be displeasing to the ear; but it has unquestionably produced an advantageous effect on the structure of the pieces. In the recitatives, which are generally not half understood, seldom listened to with any degree of attention, a plot which is even moderately complicated cannot be developed with due clearness. Hence in the Italian *opera buffa*, the action is altogether neglected; and along with its grotesque caricatures, it is distinguished for uniformity of situation, for want of dramatic progress. But the comic opera of the French, although from the space occupied by the music it is unsusceptible of any solid dramatic developement, is still calculated to produce a considerable stage effect, and speaks in a pleasing manner to the imagination. The poets have not here been prevented by the constraint of rules from following out their theatrical views. Hence these fleeting productions are in no wise deficient in the rapidity, life, and amusement, which are frequently wanting in the more correct dramatic works of the French. The distinguished favour which the *opérettes* of a *Favart*, a *Sedaine* and later poets, some of whom are still alive, always meet with in Germany, where foreign literature has long lost its commanding influence, and where the national taste is decisively declared against French tragedy, is by no means to be placed to the account of the music; it is in reality owing to their poetical merit. To cite only one example out of many, I do not hesitate to declare the whole series of scenes in *Raoul Sire de Crequy*, where the children of the drunken turnkey set the prisoner at liberty, a master-piece of the theatrical painting. How much it were to be wished that the tragedy of the French, and even their comedy in court-dress, had but a little of this truth of circumstance, life, and power of

arresting the attention. In several *operettes*, for instance in a *Richard Cœur de Lion* and a *Nina*, the traces of the romantic are not to be mistaken.

The *vaudeville* is but a variation of the comic opera. The essential difference is that it dispenses with composition, by which the comic opera forms a musical whole, as the songs are set to well-known popular airs. The incessant skipping from the song to the dialogue, often after merely a few scrapes on the violin and a few words, with the accumulation of airs mostly common, but frequently also in a style altogether different from the poetry, drives an ear accustomed to Italian music to despair. If we can once get over this, we shall not unfrequently be richly recompensed in comic drollery; even in the choice of a melody, and the allusion to the common text, there is often a display of wit. In earlier times writers of higher pretensions, a *Le Sage* and a *Piron* have laboured in the department of the *vaudeville*, and even for *marionnetes*. The wits who now dedicate themselves to this species are little known out of Paris, but this gives them no great concern. It not unfrequently happens that several of them join together, that the fruit of their common talents may be brought to light with greater speed. The parody of new theatrical pieces, the anecdotes of the day, forming the common subject of talk among all the idlers of the capital, must furnish them with a subject in the enjoyment of which little delay can be brooked. These *vaudevilles* are like the gnats that buz about in a summer evening; they often sting, but they fly merrily about so long as the sun of opportunity shines upon them. A piece like the *Despair of Jocrisse*, which, after a lapse of years, may be still given out, passes justly among these ephemeral productions, for a classical work that has gained the crown of immortality. We must, however, see it acted by Brunet, whose face is almost a mask, and who is as nearly inexhaustible in the part of the simpleton as Puncinello in his.

From a consideration of the sportive secondary species, or the mixture of the comic and the affecting, in which authors and spectators give themselves up without reserve to their natural inclinations, it appears to me evident, that as the foundation of comic wit, with the Italians consists of grotesque mimicry or buffoonery, and with the English of humour, with the French it consists of good natured gaiety. This property is everywhere visible, among the lower orders especially, where it has not been supplanted by the artifice of corruption.

With respect to the present condition of the dramatic art in France, everything depends on the endeavours to introduce the theatrical liberties of other countries, or species of a mixed de-

scription. The hopes of producing anything truly new in the two species which are alone admitted to be regular, of excelling the works already produced, of filling up the old frames in a richer manner, becomes more and more distant every day. A new work seldom obtains a decided approbation; and, even at best, this approbation is only continued till it has been found out that the work is only a new preparation of their old classical productions.

We have passed over several things relating to these endeavours, that we may at once deliver all the observations which we have to make on the subject. The attacks hitherto made against the French forms of art, first by *De la Motte*, and afterwards by *Diderot* and *Mercier*, have been like voices in the wilderness. It could not be otherwise, as the principles on which these writers proceeded were in reality destructive, not merely of the conventional forms, but of all poetical forms whatever, and as none of them showed themselves capable of supporting their doctrine in a suitable manner by their own example. Even when they were in the right they contrived nevertheless, by a false application, to be in the wrong.

The most remarkable among them is *Diderot*, whom Lessing calls the best critic of the French. I should be disposed to affirm, in opposition to this opinion, that he was no critic at all. I will not lay any stress on his mistaking the object of poetry and the fine arts, which he considered to be merely moral: a man may be a critic without being a theorist. But a man cannot be a critic without being thoroughly acquainted with the conditions, means, and styles of an art; and here the nature of the studies and acquisitions of *Diderot* renders him extremely suspicious. This ingenious sophist deals out his blows with such boisterous haste in the province of criticism, that the half of them are thrown away. The true and the false, the known and the new, the essential and the unimportant, are so mixed up together, that the highest praise we can bestow upon him is, that he was worthy of the task of disentangling them. What he wished to accomplish had either been already accomplished, though not in France, or did not deserve to be accomplished, or was altogether impracticable. His attack of the dramatic probabilities, of the excessive symmetry of the French versification, declamation, and mode of acting, was just; but he objected at the same time to all theatrical elevation, and refused to allow to the characters anything like a perfect mode of communication of what was passing within them. He nowhere assigns the reason why he held versification as not suitable, or prose as more suitable, to familiar tragedy; this has been extended by others, and by Lessing, unfortunately, among

the rest, to every species of the drama; but the ground for it evidently rests on nothing but the mistaken principles of illusion and nature, to which we have more than once adverted.* And when he gives an undue preference to the sentimental drama and the familiar tragedy, species valuable in themselves, and susceptible of being treated in a truly poetical manner; was not this on account of the application? The main thing, according to him, is not character and situations, but rank of life and family relations, that spectators in similar ranks and relations may lay the example to heart. But this would put an end to everything like true enjoyment in art. Diderot recommended that the composition should have this direction, with the very view which met with the displeasure of the Athenians when Phrynichus, who exhibited a historical tragedy founded on the events of their own times, was subjected on that account to punishment.† The view of a fire by night, from the wonderful effect produced by the combination of flames and darkness, may fill the unconcerned beholder with delight; but when our neighbour's house is burning,—*jam proximus ardet Ucalegon*—we shall hardly be disposed to consider the affair in such a picturesque light.

We see clearly that Diderot was induced to take in his sail in the same proportion that he himself made dramatic attempts. He displayed the greatest boldness in an offensive publication of his youth, in which he wished to overturn the whole dramatic system of the French; he was less daring in the dialogues which accompany the *Fils Naturel*; and he showed the greatest moderation in the treatise appended to the *Pere de Famille*. He carries his hostility a great deal too far with respect to the forms and the object of the dramatic art. But in other respects he has not gone far enough: in his view of the unities of place and time, and the mixture of seriousness and mirth, he has shown himself infected with the prejudices of his nation.

The two pieces above mentioned, which obtained an unmerited reputation on their first appearance, have long since been properly appreciated. Lessing has already pronounced a severe sentence on the *Fils Naturel*, without, however, censuring the scandalous plagiarism from Goldoni. But he calls the *Pere de Famille* an excellent piece, forgetting however to assign any grounds for his opinion. Its defective plot and want of connection have been well exposed by La Harpe. The execution in both pieces displays the utmost mannerism: the characters, who

* I have stated and refuted them in a treatise on the *Relation of the Fine Arts to Nature* in the fifth number of the periodical work *Prometheus*, published by Leo Von Seckendorf.

† See p. 46.

are everything but natural, from their frigid prating about virtue in the most hypocritical style, and the tears which they are perpetually shedding, are altogether intolerable. We Germans may justly say, *Hinc illæ lacrimæ!* hence the unnecessary tears with which our stage has ever since been overflowed. The custom which has grown up of giving long and circumstantial directions respecting the action, and which we owe also to Diderot, has been of the greatest detriment to dramatic eloquence. In this way the poet gives, as it were, an order on the player, instead of paying out of his own purse.* All good dramatists have uniformly had the action in some degree present to their minds; but if the actor requires instruction on the subject, he will hardly possess the talent of following it up in a suitable manner. The speeches should be so framed that an intelligent actor could hardly fail to give them the proper action.

It will be admitted, that long before Diderot there were serious family pictures, affecting dramas, and familiar tragedies, much better than any which he was capable of executing. Voltaire, who could never rightly succeed in comedy, gave in his *Enfant Prodigue* and *Nanine* a mixture of comic scenes and affecting situations, the latter of which are deserving of high praise. The affecting drama had been before exhibited in France by *La Chaussée*. All this was in verse: and why not? Of the familiar tragedy, with the very same moral direction for which Diderot contended, there had been several examples in England; and one of them, *Beverley, or the Gamester*, is translated into French. The period of sentimentality was of some use to the affecting or sentimental drama; but the familiar tragedy was never very successful in France, where they were too much attached to brilliancy and pomp. The *Melanie* of *La Harpe* (to whom the stage of the present day owes *Philoctete*, the most faithful imitation of a Grecian piece) abounds with those painful impressions which are the rock that this species may be said to split upon. The piece may be very well adapted to enlighten the conscience of a father who has determined to force his daughter to enter a cloister; but to other spectators it can only be painful.

Notwithstanding the opposition which Diderot experienced, he has however been the founder of a sort of school of which the most distinguished names are *Beaumarchais* and *Mercier*. The former wrote only two pieces in the spirit of his predecessor, *Eugenie*, and the *Criminal Mother*; and they display the very

* I remember to have heard the following direction in a German drama, which is not worse than many others:—"He flashes lightning at him with his eyes (*Er blüzt ihn mit den augen an*) and goes off."

same faults. His acquaintance with Spain and the Spanish theatre led him to bring something new on the stage in the way of the piece of intrigue, a species which had long been neglected. These works were more distinguished by witty sallies than by humour of character; but their greatest attraction consisted in the allusions to his own career as an author. The plot of the *Barber of Seville* is rather trite; the *Marriage of Figaro* is planned with much more art, but the manners which it portrays are loose; and it is also censurable in a poetical point of view, on account of the number of foreign excrescences with which it abounds. In both of them French characters are exhibited under the disguise of a Spanish costume which is very ill observed.* The extraordinary applause which these pieces met with would lead to the conclusion, that the French public do not hold the comedy of *Intrigue* in such low estimation as is done by the critics: but the means by which Beaumarchais pleased were certainly, in part at least, foreign to art.

The attempt of Ducis to make his countrymen acquainted with Shakspeare by modelling a few of his tragedies according to the French rules, cannot be accounted an enlargement of their theatre. We perceive here and there indeed, the "torn members of the poet;" but the whole is so constrained, disfigured, and, from the simple fulness of the original, tortured and twisted into such miserable intricacy, that even when the language is retained word for word it ceases to convey its genuine meaning. The course which these tragedies attract, especially from their affording an unusual room to the inimitable *Talma* for the display of his art, must be looked upon as no inconsiderable symptom of the dissatisfaction of the people with their old works, and the want of being more powerfully agitated.

As the Parisian theatres are at present tied down to certain kinds, and as their poetry has here a point of contact with the Government, the numerous mixed and new attempts are for the most part banished to the subordinate theatres. Of these new attempts the *Melo-dramas* constitute a great part. A statistical writer of the theatre informs us, that for a number of years back the new productions in tragedy and regular comedy have been fewest, and that the melo-dramas in number have exceeded all the others put together. They do not mean by melo-drama, as we do, a drama in which the pauses are filled up by monologue with instrumental music, but where actions in anywise wonderful, adven-

* The numerous sins of Beaumarchais against the Spanish manners and observances, are pointed out by *De la Huerta* in the introduction to his *Teatro Hispanol.*

turous, or even sensual, are exhibited in emphatic prose with suitable decorations and dresses. Advantage might be taken of this inclination to furnish a better description of entertainment; for the most of the melo-dramas are unfortunately rude even to insipidity, and resemble abortive attempts at the romantic.

In the sphere of dramatic literature the labours of a *Le Mercier* are undoubtedly deserving of the critic's attention. This able man endeavours to break through the prescribed limits in every possible way, and is so passionately fond of his art that nothing can deter him from it; although almost every new attempt which he makes converts the pit into a true field of battle.*

From all this we may infer, that the inclinations of the French public, when they forget the duties imbibed by them from Boileau's Art of Poetry, are not altogether so hostile to the dramatic liberties of other nations as might be supposed, and that the old and narrow system is chiefly upheld by a superstitious attachment to traditional opinions.

The *histrionic* art, particularly in high comedy and tragedy, has been long carried in France to a great degree of perfection. In external dignity, quickness, correctness of memory, and, in a wonderful degree, of propriety and elegance in the delivery of verse, the best French actors can hardly be surpassed. Their efforts to please are incredible; of every moment which they pass on the stage they endeavour to avail themselves as a valuable

* Since these Lectures were held, such a tumult arose in the theatre at Paris on the representation of his *Christopher Columbus*, that several of the champions of Boileau came off with bruised and broken shins. They were in the right to fight like desperadoes; for if this piece had succeeded it would have been all over with the consecrated unities and good taste in the separation of the heroic and the low. The first act takes place in the house of Columbus, the second at the court of Isabella, the third and last on shipboard near the new world. The object of the poet was to show, that the man in whom any grand idea originates is everywhere opposed and thwarted by the limited and common-place views of other men; but that the strength of his enthusiasm enables him to overcome all obstacles. In his own house and among his acquaintances Columbus is considered as insane; at court he obtains with difficulty a lukewarm support; in his own vessel a mutiny is on the point of breaking out when the wished for land is discovered, and the piece ends with the exclamation of "Land, land!"—All this is conceived and planned in a very skilful manner; but in the execution there are still many deficiencies. In another piece not yet acted or printed, called *La Journée des Dupes*, which I heard the author read, he has painted with historical truth, both in regard to circumstances and the spirit of the age, a well known court cabal against Cardinal Richelieu, which was unsuccessful. It is a political comedy, in which the Rag-gatherer as well as the King express themselves in language suitable to their stations. The poet has, with the greatest ingenuity, shown the manner in which trivial causes assist or impede the execution of a great political design, the dissimulation practised by the persons of the drama towards others, and even towards themselves, and the different tones which they assume according to circumstances; in a word, he has exhibited the whole inward aspect of the political game.

opportunity. The highly fastidious taste of a Paris pit, and the wholesome severity of the journalists, reduce them, it is true, to the necessity of incessant competition; and the circumstance of such a number of classical works, which for generations have been in the possession of the stage, contributes also greatly to their excellence in their art. As the spectators have these works nearly by heart, their whole attention may be directed to the acting, and every faulty syllable meets in this way with censure.

In high comedy the social refinement of the nation gives great advantage to their actors. But with respect to tragical composition, the art of the actor should also accommodate itself to the spirit of the poetry. I am inclined to doubt, however, whether this is the case with the French actors, and whether the authors of the tragedies, especially those of the age of Louis XIV. would altogether recognize themselves in the mode in which these compositions are at present represented.

The tragical imitation and recitation of the French oscillate between two opposite extremes, the first of which is occasioned by the prevailing tone of the piece, while the second seems rather to be at variance with it,—between measured formality and extravagant boisterousness. The first might formerly preponderate, but the balance is now on the other side.

Let us hear the description of Voltaire of the manner in which Augustus delivered his discourse to Cinna and Maximus in the time of Louis XIV. Augustus entered with the step of a braggadocio, his head covered with a four-cornered peruke which hung down to his girdle; the peruke was stuck full of laurel leaves, and above this he wore a large hat with a double row of red feathers. He seated himself on a huge easy chair with two steps, Cinna and Maximus on two small chairs; and the pompous declamation fully corresponded to the ostentatious manner in which he made his appearance. As at that time, and even long afterwards, tragedies were acted in the newest fashioned court dress, with large cravats, swords, and hats, no other movements were practicable but such as were allowable in an ante-chamber, or, at most, a slight waving of the hand; and it was even considered a bold theatrical attempt, when, in the last scene of *Polyeucte*, Severus entered with his hat on his head for the purpose of accusing Felix of treachery, and the latter listened to him with his hat under his arm.

However, there were even early examples of an extravagance of an opposite description. In the *Mariamne* of Mairêt, an older poet than Corneille, the player who acted Herod roared himself to death. This may indeed be called “out-heroding Herod!” When Voltaire was instructing an actress in some

tragic part, she said to him, "Were I to play in this manner, Sir, they would say the devil was in me."—"Very right," answered Voltaire, "an actress ought to have the devil in her." This expression proves, at least, no very keen sense for that dignity and sweetness which in an ideal composition, such as the French tragedy pretends to be, ought never to be lost sight of even in the wildest whirlwind of passion.

I found occasionally, even in the action of the very best players of the present day, sudden leaps from the measured solemnity in recitation and gesticulation which the general tone of the composition required, to a boisterousness of passion absolutely convulsive, without any due preparation or softening by intervening gradations. They are led to this by a sort of obscure feeling, that the conventional forms of poetry generally impede the movements of nature; when the poet anywhere leaves them at liberty they then indemnify themselves for the former constraint, and load, as it were, this rare moment of abandonment with the whole amount of life and animation which had been kept back, and which ought to have been equally diffused over the whole. Hence their convulsive and obstreperous violence. In bravura they take care not to be deficient; but they frequently lose sight of the true spirit of the composition. In general, they consider their parts as a sort of mosaic work of brilliant passages (with the single exception of the powerful Talma), and they endeavour to make the most of each separate passage, independently of the rest, than to go back to the invisible central point of the character, and to consider the whole of the expressions as so many emanations from that point. They are always afraid of under-doing their parts; and hence they are worst qualified for reserved action, for eloquent silence, where, under an appearance of outward tranquillity, the most hidden emotions of the mind are betrayed. However, this is a part which is seldom imposed on them by their poets; and if the cause of the above excessive violence in the expression of passion is not to be found in their works, they at all events occasion the actor to lay greater stress on superficial brilliancy than on a profound knowledge of character.*

* See a treatise of *M. Von Humboldt* the elder, in Goethe's *Propylæen* on the French acting, equally distinguished for a refined and solid spirit of observation.

LECTURE XII.

Comparison of the English and Spanish theatres—Spirit of the romantic drama—Shakspeare—His age and the circumstances of his life—How far costume is necessary, or may be dispensed with—Shakspeare the greatest drawer of characters—Vindication of the genuineness of his pathos—Play on words—Moral delicacy—Irony—Mixture of the tragic and comic—The part of the fool or clown—Shakspeare's language and versification—Account of his several works: comedies, tragedies, and historical dramas—Appendix on the pieces of Shakspeare said to be spurious.

IN conformity with the plan which we at first laid down, we shall now proceed to treat of the English and Spanish theatres.—We were compelled in passing to allude cursorily, on various occasions, sometimes to the one and sometimes to the other, partly for the sake of placing, by means of contrast, many ideas in a clearer light, and partly on account of the influence which these stages have had on the theatres of other countries. Both the English and Spaniards possess a very rich dramatic literature; both have had a number of fruitful dramatic poets of great talents, among whom even the least admired and celebrated, considered as a whole, display uncommon aptitude for dramatic animation and insight into the essence of theatrical effect. The history of their theatres has no connexion with that of the Italians and French; for it developed itself wholly from the fulness of its own strength without any foreign influence: the attempts to bring it back to an imitation of the ancients, or even of the French, have either been attended with no success, or not been made till a late period in the decay of the drama. The formation of these two stages is equally independent of each other; the Spanish poets were altogether unacquainted with the English; and in the older and most important period of the English theatre I could discover no trace of any knowledge of Spanish plays, (though their novels and romances were certainly known); and it was not till the time of Charles II. that translations from Calderon made their appearance.

So many things among men have been handed down from century to century and from nation to nation, and the human mind has in general displayed such tardiness of invention, that originality in any department of mental exertion is everywhere a rare phenomenon. We are desirous of seeing the result of the efforts of enterprising heads when they proceed straight forward in invention, without concerning themselves with what has else-

where been carried to a high degree of perfection; when they lay the foundation of the new edifice on uncovered ground, and derive all the preparations, all the building materials, from their own means. We participate, in some measure, in the joy of success, when we see them advance rapidly from their first helplessness and necessity to a finished mastery in their art. The history of the Grecian theatre would afford us this cheering prospect could we witness its rudest beginnings, which were not preserved, for they were not even committed to writing; but it is easy, when we compare together Æschylus and Sophocles, to form some idea of the preceding period. The Greeks neither inherited nor borrowed their dramatic art from any other people; it was original and native, and for that very reason it could produce a living and powerful effect. But it ended with the period when Greeks imitated Greeks; namely, when the Alexandrian poets began learnedly and critically to compose dramas after the model of the great tragic writers. The reverse of this was the case with the Romans: they received the form and substance of their dramas from the Greeks; they never attempted to act according to their own discretion, and to express their own way of thinking; and hence they occupy so insignificant a place in the history of dramatic art. Among the nations of modern Europe, the English and Spanish alone, as yet (for the German stage is but forming), possess a theatre entirely original and national, which, in its own peculiar shape, has arrived at maturity.

Those critics who consider the authority of the ancients as models to be such, that in poetry, as in all the other arts, there can be no salvation beyond the pale of imitation, affirm, that as the nations in question have not followed this course, they have brought nothing but irregular works on the stage, which, though they may possess occasional passages of splendour and beauty, as a whole, must ever be reprobated for barbarousness and want of form. We have already, in the introductory part of these Lectures, stated our sentiments in a general manner respecting this way of thinking; but we must now examine the subject somewhat more closely.

If the assertion were founded, all that distinguishes the works of the greatest English and Spanish dramatists, a Shakspeare and a Calderon, ought to rank them beneath the ancients; they would in no manner be of any importance for the theory, and could at most appear remarkable, on the assumption that the obstinacy of these nations, in refusing to comply with the rules, might have afforded more ample scope to the poets to display their native originality, though at the expense of art. But even this assumption will, on a more narrow examination, appear extremely doubt-

ful. The poetic spirit requires to be limited, that it may move within its range with a becoming liberty, as has been felt by all nations on the first invention of metre; it must act according to laws derivable from its own essence, otherwise its strength will be evaporated in boundless vacuity.

The works of genius cannot therefore be allowed to be without form; but of this there is no danger. That we may answer this objection of want of form, we must first come to an understanding respecting the meaning of form, which most critics, and more especially those who insist on a stiff regularity, understand merely in a mechanical, and not in an organical sense. Form is mechanical when, through external influence, it is communicated to any material merely as an accidental addition without reference to its quality; as, for example, when we give a particular shape to a soft mass that it may retain the same after its induration. Organical form, again, is innate; it unfolds itself from within, and acquires its determination along with the complete developement of the germ. We everywhere discover such forms in nature throughout the whole range of living powers, from the crystallization of salts and minerals to plants and flowers, and from them to the human figure. In the fine arts, as well as in the province of nature, the highest artist, all genuine forms are organical, that is, determined by the quality of the work. In a word, the form is nothing but a significant exterior, the speaking physiognomy of each thing, disfigured by no destructive accidents, which gives a true evidence of its hidden essence.

Hence it is evident that the spirit of poetry, which, though imperishable, wanders as it were through different bodies, so often as it is newly born in the human race, must, from the nutritive substance of an altered age, be fashioned into a body of a different conformation. The forms vary with the direction of the poetical sense; and when we give to the new kinds of poetry the old names, and judge of them according to the ideas conveyed by these names, the application of the authority of classical antiquity which we make is altogether unjustifiable. No one should be tried before a tribunal to which he does not belong. We may safely admit, that the most of the dramatic works of the English and Spaniards are neither tragedies nor comedies in the sense of the ancients: they are romantic dramas. That the stage of a people who, in its foundation and formation, neither knew nor wished to know anything of foreign models will possess many peculiarities, and not only deviate from, but even exhibit a striking contrast to, the theatres of other nations who had a common model for imitation before their eyes, may be very easily supposed, and we should only be astonished were

it otherwise. But when in two nations differing, in a physical, moral, political, and religious respect, so widely as the English and Spanish, the stages which arose at the same time without being known to each other possess, along with external and internal diversities, the most striking features of affinity, the attention of the most thoughtless must be turned to this phenomenon; and the conjecture will naturally occur to him, that the same, or, at least, a kindred principle must have prevailed in the development of both. This comparison, however, of the English and Spanish theatre, in their common contrast with all the dramatic literature which has grown up from imitation of the ancients, has, so far as we know, never yet been attempted. Could we raise from the dead a countryman contemporary and intelligent admirer of Shakspeare, and another of Calderon, and introduce to their acquaintance the works of the poet to which they were strangers, they would both, without doubt, considering the subject rather from a national than a general point of view, enter with difficulty into the above idea, and have many objections to urge against it. But here a reconciling criticism* must step in; and this perhaps may be best exercised by a German, who is free from the nationalities of either the English or Spaniards, yet friendly from inclination to both, and prevented by no jealousy from acknowledging the greatness which has been exhibited in other countries earlier than his own.

The similarity of the English and Spanish theatres does not merely consist in the bold neglect of the unities of place and time, and in the mixture of comic and tragic ingredients: that they were unwilling or unable to comply with the rules and with reason (which, in the meaning of certain critics, are words of equal signification) may be considered as an evidence of properties of merely a negative description; it lies much deeper, in the inmost substance of the fables, and in the essential relations, through which every deviating form becomes a true requisite that has its signification along with its validity. What they have in common with each other is the spirit of the romantic poetry dramatically pronounced. However, to explain ourselves with due limita-

* This appropriate expression was, if we mistake not, first used by *M. Adam Müller* in his *Lectures on German Science and Literature*. If, however, he gives himself out for the inventor of the thing itself, he is, to use the softest word, in an error. Long before him other Germans had endeavoured to reconcile the contraries of taste of different ages and nations, and to pay due homage to all genuine poetry and art. Between good and bad, it is true, no reconciliation is possible.

† This word is hardly English: but were *nationalität* to be translated *national prejudice*, it would be putting stronger language in the author's mouth than he has actually used.—*TRANS.*

tion, the Spanish theatre, in our opinion, down to its decline and fall since the commencement of the eighteenth century, is almost altogether romantic; the English is only completely so in Shakspeare, its founder and greatest master: in later poets the romantic principle appears more or less degenerated, or is no longer perceivable, although the force introduced by it into the march of dramatic composition has been outwardly pretty well retained. The manner in which the different ways of thinking of two nations, a northern and a southern, have been expressed; the former endowed with a gloomy, the latter with a glowing imagination; the one nation possessed of a scrutinizing seriousness disposed to draw within themselves, the other impelled outwardly by the violence of passion; this we shall be enabled to explain in the most satisfactory manner at the close of this section, when we come to institute a parallel between Shakspeare and Calderon, the only two poets who are entitled to be called great.

Of the origin and essence of the romantic I treated in the first Lecture, and I shall here, therefore, merely mention the subject in a brief manner. The antique art and poetry separate, in a strict manner, things which are dissimilar; the romantic delights in indissoluble mixtures; all contrarieties: nature and art, poetry and prose, seriousness and mirth, recollection and anticipation, spirituality and sensuality, terrestrial and celestial, life and death, are blended together by them in the most intimate manner. As the oldest lawgivers delivered their mandatory instructions and prescriptions in measured melodies; as this is in a fabulous manner attributed to Orpheus, the first softener of the yet untamed race of mortals: in like manner the whole of the ancient poetry and art is as it were a *rhythmical nomos* (law) an harmonious promulgation of the permanently established legislation of a world submitted to a beautiful order, and reflecting in itself the eternal images of things. The romantic poetry again is the expression of the secret attraction to a chaos which is concealed beneath the regulated creation even in its very bosom, and which is perpetually striving after new and wonderful births; the animating spirit of original love hovers here anew above the waters. The former is more simple, clear, and like to nature in the self-existent perfection of her separate works; the latter, notwithstanding its fragment-like appearance, approaches more to the secret of the universe. For the conception can only circumscribe each thing separately, but nothing can ever in truth exist separately; feeling perceives all in all at one and the same time.

Respecting the poetical species with which we are here occupied, we compared the antique tragedy to a group in sculpture: the figures correspond to the characters, their grouping to the action,

and to these the consideration in both productions of art as exclusively directed as the only object exhibited. But the romantic drama must be viewed as a large picture, where not merely figure and motion are exhibited in richer groups, but where even what surrounds the persons is also portrayed; where we see not merely the nearest objects, but are allowed the prospect of a considerable distance, and all this under a magical light, which assists in giving to the impression that particular determination which may be wanted.

Such a picture must be bounded in a less perfect manner than the group; for it is like a fragment cut out of the optic scene of the world. However the painter, by enclosing his foreground, by throwing the whole of his light and other means of giving due stability to the view towards the middle, will know that he must neither wander beyond the composition, nor omit anything within it.

In the representation of the figure, painting cannot compete with sculpture, while the former only exhibits it by a deception and from a single point of view; but, on the other hand, it communicates more life to its imitations, by colours which are made to express the finest gradations of mental expression in the countenance. The look which can be given only in a very imperfect manner by sculpture enables us in painting to read much deeper in the mind, and to perceive its lightest movements. Its peculiar charm, in short, consists in this, that it enables us to see in bodily objects what is least corporeal, namely, light and air.

The very same description of beauties are peculiar to the romantic drama. It does not, like the old tragedy, separate seriousness and the action in a rigid manner from among the ingredients of life; it embraces at once the whole of the checkered drama with all its circumstances; and while it seems only to represent subjects brought accidentally together, it satisfies the indefinite demands of fancy, buries us in reflections on the inexpressible signification of the objects which we view blended by distribution, proximity and distance, light and colouring, into one harmonious whole; and thus lends, as it were, a soul to the prospect before us.

The alteration of times and places, supposing its influence on the mind to be included in the picture, and that it comes to the aid of the theatrical perspective with reference to what is indicated in the distance or half-concealed by the objects under which it is covered; the contrast of mirth and seriousness, supposing that in degree and kind they bear a relation to each other; finally, the mixture of dialogical and lyrical ingredients, by which

the poet is enabled to transform, in a greater or less degree, his characters into poetical natures: these, in my opinion, are not mere licenses but true beauties in the romantic drama. In all these points, and in many others besides, we shall find the English and Spanish works, which are particularly deserving of that name, fully alike to each other, however different they may be in other respects.

We proceed first to the English theatre, as it more early arrived at maturity than the Spanish. In both we must occupy ourselves more particularly with Shakspeare and Calderon, but in an inverted order. Shakspeare may be considered as the first of the English; any remarks on the earlier or contemporary antiquities of the English stage may be made in a review of its history. But Calderon had many predecessors; he is at once the summit and almost the conclusion of the dramatic art among the Spaniards.

While I wish to speak with that brevity which the nature of my subject requires of a poet in the study of whom I have employed many years of my life, I find myself in no small degree of embarrassment. I know not where to begin; for I should never be able to end, were I to say all that I have felt and thought on the perusal of his works. A more than ordinary intimacy with a poet prevents us, perhaps, from placing ourselves in the situation of those who sit down to him for the first time: we are too familiar with his most striking peculiarities, to be able to pronounce upon the first impression which they are calculated to make on others. On the other hand we ought to possess, and to have the power of communicating, more correct ideas of his mode of procedure, of his concealed or less obvious views, and of the meaning and import of his united efforts, than others whose acquaintance with him is more limited.

Shakspeare is the pride of his nation. A late poet has, with propriety, called him the genius of the British isles. He was the idol of his contemporaries; and after the interval of puritanical fanaticism, which commenced in a succeeding age, and put an end to everything like liberal knowledge; after the reign of Charles the Second, during which his works were either not acted, or very much disfigured, his fame began to revive with more than its original brightness towards the beginning of the last century; and since that period it has increased with the progress of time; and for centuries to come, I speak with the greatest confidence, it will continue to gather strength, like an Alpine *avalanche*, at every period of its descent. As an important earnest of the future extension of his fame, we may allude to the enthusiasm with which he was naturalized in Germany, the moment that he was known. The language, and the impossibility of translating him with fidel-

ity, will be for ever, perhaps, an invincible obstacle to his general diffusion in the South of Europe.* In England, the greatest actors vie with each other in the characters of Shakspeare; the printers in splendid editions of his works; and the painters in transferring his scenes to the canvass. Like Dante, Shakspeare has received the indispensable but cumbersome honour of being treated like a classical author of antiquity. The oldest editions have been carefully collated, and where the readings seem corrupted many improvements have been attempted; and the whole literature of his age has been drawn forth from the oblivion to which it had been consigned, for the sake of explaining the phrases, and illustrating the allusions, of Shakspeare. Commentators have succeeded one another in such numbers, that their labours, with the critical controversies to which they have given rise, constitute of themselves a library of no inconsiderable magnitude. These labours are deserving of our praise and gratitude; and more especially the historical inquiries into the sources from which Shakspeare drew his materials, and into the former state of the English stage. But with respect to the criticisms which are merely of a philological nature, I am frequently compelled to differ from the commentators; and where they consider him merely as a poet, endeavour to pronounce upon his merits, and to enter into his views, I must separate myself from them entirely. I have hardly ever found either truth or profundity in their observations; and these critics seem to be but stammering interpreters of the general and almost idolatrous admiration of his countrymen. There may be people in England, who entertain the same views with themselves; and we know that a satirical poet has represented Shakspeare, with reference to his commentators, as Actæon devoured by his own dogs; and, following up the story of Ovid, exhibited a female that had written on the great poet under the figure of the snarling Lycisca.

We shall endeavour, in the first place, to remove some of the false views which have been adopted, that we may clear the way for our pure admiration, and be enabled to offer it without any hesitation or reserve.

From all the accounts which have come down to us, we learn that the contemporaries of Shakspeare knew well what they possessed in him; and that they felt and understood him better than they did the most of those who succeeded him. In those days a work was generally ushered into the world with recommendatory

* This impossibility extends also to France; for it must not be supposed that a literal translation can ever be a faithful one. Mrs. Montague has sufficiently shown how wretchedly Voltaire translated some passages of Hamlet, and the first acts of Julius Cæsar, into rhymeless Alexandrines.

verses; and one of the productions of this nature, in an early edition of Shakspeare, by an unknown author, contains some of the most beautiful and happy lines that ever were applied to any poet.* An idea, however, soon became prevalent that Shakspeare was a rude and wild genius, who poured forth at random and without aim or object his unconnected compositions. Ben Jonson, a younger contemporary and rival of Shakspeare, who laboured in the sweat of his brow, but with no great success, to form the English stage on the model of the ancients, was of opinion that he did not blot enough, and because he did not possess much school-learning, that he owed more to nature than to art. The learned, and sometimes rather pedantic, Milton was also of this opinion, when he says,

Our sweetest Shakspeare, fancy's child,
Warbles his native wood-notes wild.

Yet it is highly honourable to Milton, that the sweetness of Shakspeare, the quality which of all others has been least allowed, was felt and acknowledged by him. The modern editors, both in their prefaces, which may be considered as so many rhetorical exercises in praise of the poet, and in their separate observations, go still a great deal farther. They not only admit the irregularity of his pieces, according to principles which are not applicable to them, but they accuse him of bombast, of a confused, ungrammatical, and conceited mode of writing, and even of the most contemptible buffoonery. Pope asserts, that he wrote both better and worse than any other man. All the scenes and passages which did not suit the littleness of his taste he wished to place to the account of interpolating players; and he was in the right road, had his opinion been taken, of mangling Shakspeare in a most disgraceful manner. We are not therefore to be astonished if foreigners, with the exception of Germans of latter times, have, from ignorance, improved upon these opinions.† They speak of Shakspeare's plays as monstrous productions, which could only have been given to the world by a disordered imagination in a barbarous age; and Voltaire crowns the whole with more than usual assurance, when he observes that *Hamlet*, the profound

* It begins with the words: *A mind reflecting ages past*, and is subscribed, I. M. S.

† Lessing was the first to speak of Shakspeare in a becoming tone; but he said unfortunately a great deal too little of him, as in the time when he wrote the *Dramaturgie* this poet had not yet appeared on our age. Since that time he has been more particularly noticed by Herder in the *Blättern von deutscher Art und Kunst*; Goethe, in *Wilhelm Meister*; and Tieck, in Letters on Shakspeare (*Poetisches Journal*, 1800), which break off, however, almost at the commencement.

master-piece of the philosophical poet, "appears the work of a drunken savage." That foreigners, and Frenchmen in particular, who frequently speak in the most strange language of antiquity and the middle ages, as if cannibalism had first been put an end to in Europe by Louis XIV. should entertain this opinion of Shakspeare, might be pardonable; but that Englishmen should adopt such calumny of that glorious epoch of their history, in which the foundation of their greatness was laid,* is to me incomprehensible. Shakspeare flourished and wrote in the last half of the reign of Queen Elizabeth and the first half of that of James I.; and consequently under monarchs who were learned themselves, and held literature in honour. The policy of modern Europe, by which the relations of its different states have been so variously interwoven, commenced a century before. The cause of the protestants was decided by the accession of Elizabeth to the throne; and the attachment to the ancient belief cannot therefore be urged as a proof of the prevailing darkness. Such was the zeal for the study of the ancients, that even court ladies, and the Queen herself, were intimately acquainted with Latin and Greek, and could speak the former with fluency; a degree of knowledge which we should in vain seek for in the European courts of the present day. The trade and navigation of the English, which they carried on with all the four quarters of the world, made them acquainted with the customs and mental productions of other nations; and it would appear that they were then more indulgent to foreign manners than they are in the present day. Italy had already produced nearly all for which her literature is distinguished; and translations were diligently, and even successfully, executed in verse from the Italians. They were not unacquainted with the Spanish literature, for it is certain that *Don Quixote* was read in England soon after its first appearance. Bacon, the founder of modern experimental philosophy, and of whom it may be said, that he carried in his pocket all that merits the name of philosophy in the eighteenth century, was a contemporary of Shakspeare. His fame, as a writer, did

* The English work with which foreigners of every country are perhaps best acquainted is Hume's History; and there we have a most unjustifiable account both of Shakspeare and his age. "Born in a *rude age*, and educated in the lowest manner, without any instruction either *from the world* or from books." How could a man of Hume's acuteness suppose for a moment that a poet, whose characters display such an intimate acquaintance with life, who, as an actor and manager of a theatre, must have come in contact with all descriptions of individuals, had no instruction from the world? But this is not the worst; he goes even so far as to say, "a reasonable propriety of thought he cannot for any time uphold." This is nearly as offensive as Voltaire's "drunken savage."—TRANS.

not indeed burst forth till after his death; but what a number of ideas must have been in circulation before such an author could arise! Many branches of human knowledge have, since that time, been cultivated to a greater extent, but merely those branches which are totally unproductive to poetry: chemistry, mechanics, manufactures, and rural and political economy, will never enable a man to become a poet. I have elsewhere* examined into the pretensions of modern cultivation, as it is called, which looks down with such contempt on all preceding ages; I have shown that it is all little, superficial, and unsubstantial at bottom. The pride of what has been called the present maturity of human reason has come to a miserable end; and the structures erected by those pedagogues of the human race have fallen to pieces like the baby-houses of children.

The tone of society at present compels us to remark, that there is a wide difference between cultivation and what is called polish. That artificial polish which puts an end to everything like original communication, and subjects all intercourse to the insipid uniformity of certain rules, was undoubtedly unknown in the age of Shakspeare, as it is still in a great measure in England in the present day. They possessed the consciousness of healthful energy, which always expressed itself boldly, though often petulantly. The spirit of chivalry was not yet extinguished; and a Queen who required the observance of much more regard for her sex than for her dignity, and who, from her determination, wisdom, and magnanimity, was, in fact, well qualified to infuse an ardent enthusiasm into the minds of her subjects, inflamed that spirit to the most noble love of glory and renown. Remains of the feudal independence were also still in existence; the nobility vied with each other in splendour of dress and number of retinue, and every great lord had a sort of small court of his own. The distinction of ranks was yet strongly marked; and this is what is most to be wished for by the dramatic poet. In discourse they were delighted with quick and unexpected answers; and the witty sally passed rapidly, like a ball, from mouth to mouth, till it could no longer be kept up. This, and the excessive extent to which a play on words was carried (for which king James himself had a great fondness, so that we need not wonder at the universality of the mode), may be considered in the light of bad taste; but to take it for a symptom of rudeness and barbarity, is not less absurd than to infer the poverty of a people from their luxurious extravagance. These strained repartees frequently occur in Shakspeare, with the view of painting the actual tone of

* In my Lectures on the *Spirit of the Age*.

the society of his day; it does not follow, however, that they met with his approbation, but, on the contrary, it appears that he held them in derision. Hamlet says, in the scene with the Grave-digger, "By the Lord, Horatio, these three years I have taken note of it; the age is grown so picked, that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier he galls his kibe." And Lorenzo, in the *Merchant of Venice*, alluding to Launcelot:—

O dear discretion, how his words are suited!
The fool hath planted in his memory
An army of good words: and I do know
A many fools, that stand in better place,
Garnish'd like him, that for a tricksy word
Defy the matter.

Besides, Shakspeare, in a thousand places, lays an uncommonly great stress on the correct and refined tone of good company, and warns against every deviation from it either through boorishness or affected foppery; he not only gives the most admirable lectures on the subject, but he represents it in all its gradations in every rank, age, and sex.—What foundation is there, then, for the alleged barbarity of that age? Its indecency? But if this is to be admitted as a test, then the age of Pericles and Augustus must also be described as rude and uncultivated; for Aristophanes and Horace, who both were considered as models of urbanity, display at times the coarsest indelicacy. The diversity in the moral feeling of nations on this subject depends on other causes. It is true that Shakspeare sometimes introduces us to improper company; at other times he suffers ambiguous expressions to be used in the presence of women and even by women themselves. This species of petulance was, probably not then unusual. He certainly did not do so to please the multitude, for in many of his pieces there is not the slightest trace of anything of this sort to be found; and what virgin tenderness does he not preserve throughout many of his female characters! When we see the liberties taken by other dramatic poets in England in his time, and even much later, we must account him comparatively chaste and moral. Neither must we overlook certain circumstances in the then state of the theatre. The female parts were not acted by women, but by boys; and no person of the fair sex appeared in the theatre without a mask. Under such a carnival disguise, much might be heard by them, and much might be ventured to be said in their presence, which, in other circumstances, would have been quite unsuitable. It is certainly to be wished that decency should be observed on all public occasions, and consequently also on the stage; but even in this it is possible

to go too far. That censorious spirit, which scents out impurity in every sally of a bold and vivacious description, is at best but an ambiguous criterion of purity of morals; and there is frequently concealed under this hypocrisy the consciousness of an impure imagination. The determination to tolerate nothing which has the least reference to the sensual relation between the two sexes may be carried to a pitch extremely oppressive to a dramatic poet, and injurious to the boldness and freedom of his composition. If considerations of such a nature were to be attended to, many of the happiest parts of the plays of Shakspeare, for example, in *Measure for Measure*, and *All's Well that Ends Well*, which are handled with a due regard to decency, must be set aside for their impropriety.

Had no other monument of the age of Elizabeth come down to us than the works of Shakspeare, I should, from them alone, have formed the most advantageous idea of its state of social cultivation. Those who look through such strange spectacles as to find nothing in them but rudeness and barbarity, when they cannot deny what I have just now advanced, have no other resource for themselves but to say, "What has Shakspeare to do with the cultivation of his age? He had no share in it. Born in a low situation, ignorant and uneducated, he passed his life in low society, and laboured for bread to please a vulgar audience, without ever dreaming of fame or posterity."

In all this there is not a single word of truth, though it has been repeated a thousand times. We know, it is true, very little of the life of the poet; and what we do know, for the most part, consists of raked up anecdotes of a very suspicious nature, nearly of such a description as those which are told at inns to inquisitive strangers, who wish to know something of a celebrated man in the place where he lives. The first actual document which enabled us to have a peep into his family concerns was the discovery of his will. It betrayed an extraordinary deficiency of critical acumen in the commentators of Shakspeare, that none of them, as far as we know, have ever thought of availing themselves of his sonnets for tracing the circumstances of his life. These sonnets paint most unequivocally the actual situation and sentiments of the poet; they enable us to become acquainted with the passions of the man; they even contain the most remarkable confessions of his youthful errors. Shakspeare's father was a man of property, whose ancestors had held the office of magistrate in Stratford, and in a diploma from the Herald's Office, for the renewal or confirmation of his coat of arms, he is styled *Gentleman*. Our poet, the eldest of four children, could not, it is true, receive an academical education, as he married when hardly eighteen, probably

in consequence of family arrangements. In this private way of life he continued but a very few years; and he was either enticed to London from the wearisomeness of his situation, or banished from home, as it is said, in consequence of his irregularities. He there resorted to the situation of player, which he considered at first as a degradation, principally because he was seduced by the example of his comrades to participate in their wild and irregular manner of life.* It is extremely probable, that by the poetical fame which he acquired in the progress of his career, he was the principal means of ennobling the stage, and bringing the situation of a player into better repute. Even at a very early age he endeavoured to distinguish himself as a poet in other walks than those of the stage, as is proved by his juvenile poems of *Adonis* and *Lucrece*. He afterwards obtained the situation of joint proprietor and manager of the theatre for which he laboured. That he was not admitted to the society of persons of distinction is altogether incredible; besides many others, he found in the Earl of Southampton, the friend of the unfortunate Essex, a most liberal and kind patron. His pieces were not merely the delight of the million, but in great favour at court: the two monarchs under whose reigns he wrote were, according to the testimony of a contemporary, altogether taken with him.† They were acted at court; and Elizabeth appears herself to have given occasion to the writing of more than one of them for the celebration of her court festivals. It is known that King James honoured Shakspeare so far as to write to him with his own hand. All this looks very unlike either contempt or banishment into the obscurity of a low circle. Shakspeare acquired by his activity as a poet, player, and stage-manager, a considerable property, which he enjoyed in his native spot, in retirement and in the society of a beloved daughter, in the last years of his too short life. Immediately after his death a monument was erected over his grave, which may be considered sumptuous for those times.

* In one of his sonnets he says:—

O, for my sake do you with fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmless deeds,
That did not better for my life provide,
Than public means which public manners breeds.

And in the following:—

Your love and pity doth the impression fill,
Which *vulgar scandal* stamp'd upon my brow.

† Ben Jonson:—

And make those flights upon the banks of Thames,
That so did take Eliza and our James!

Amidst such brilliant success, and with such distinguished proofs of respect and honour from his contemporaries, it would be singular indeed, if Shakspeare, notwithstanding the modesty of a great mind, which he certainly possessed in a peculiar degree, should never have dreamed of posthumous fame. As a profound thinker he had pretty accurately taken the measure of the circle of human capabilities, and he could say to himself with confidence, that many of his productions would not easily be surpassed. What foundation then is there for the contrary assertion, which would degrade the immortal artist to the situation of a daily labourer for a rude multitude? Merely this, that he himself published no edition of his whole works. We do not reflect, that a poet, always accustomed to labour immediately for the stage, who has often enjoyed the triumph of overpowering assembled crowds of spectators, and drawing from them the most tumultuous applause, who is not dependent on the caprice of vitiated stage directors,* but left to his own discretion in the selection of a proper mode of theatrical composition, cares naturally much less for the closet of the solitary reader. In the first formation of a national stage, more especially, we find frequent examples of such negligence. Of the almost innumerable pieces of Lope de Vega, many undoubtedly never were printed, and are thereby lost; and Cervantes did not print his earlier dramas, though he certainly boasts of them as meritorious works. As Shakspeare, on his retiring from the theatre, left his manuscripts behind with his fellow managers, he might rely on theatrical tradition for handing them down to posterity, which would indeed have been sufficient for that purpose, if the closing of the theatres, under the oppression of the puritans, had not interrupted the natural order of things. We know, besides, that the poets used then to sell the exclusive possession of their pieces to a theatre;* it is therefore not improbable that the right of property in his unprinted pieces was no longer vested in Shakspeare, or had not at least yet reverted to him. His fellow managers entered on the publication seven years after his death (which probably surprised him in the intention) as it would appear on their own account, and for their own advantage.

The ignorance or learning of our poet has been the subject of endless controversy, and yet it is a matter of the easiest determination. Shakspeare was poor in dead learning but he possessed a fulness of living and applicable knowledge. He knew Latin, and even something of Greek, though not, probably, enough to read

* This is still perhaps not uncommon in some countries. The Venetian Director Medebach, for whose company many of Goldoni's comedies were composed, claimed an exclusive right to their property.—TRANS.

the writers with ease in the original language. Of the modern languages, the French and Italian, he had also but a superficial acquaintance. The general direction of his inclination was not towards the collection of words but of facts. He had a very extensive acquaintance with English books, original and translated: we may safely affirm, that he had read all that his language then contained which could be of any use to him in any of his poetical objects. He was sufficiently intimate with mythology to employ it in the only manner he wished, as a symbolical ornament. He had formed the most correct notions of the spirit of ancient history and more particularly of that of the Romans; and the history of his own country was familiar to him even in detail. Fortunately for him it had not yet been treated in a diplomatic and pragmatical, but merely in the chronicle style; that is, it had not yet assumed the appearance of dry investigations respecting the developement of political relations, diplomatical transactions, finances, &c. but exhibited a visible image of the living and moving of an age full of distinguished deeds. Shakspeare was an attentive observer of nature; he knew the technical language of mechanics and artisans; he seems to have been well travelled in the interior of England, and to have been a diligent inquirer of navigators respecting other countries; and he was most accurately acquainted with all the popular usages, opinions, and traditions which could be of use in poetry.

The proofs of his ignorance, on which the greatest stress is laid, are a few geographical blunders and anachronisms. Because in a comedy founded on a tale, he makes ships land in Bohemia, he has been the subject of laughter. But I conceive we should be very unjust towards him, were we to conclude that he did not, as well as ourselves, possess the valuable but by no means difficult knowledge that Bohemia is no where bounded by the sea. He could never, in that case, have looked into a map of Germany, whereas he describes the maps of both Indies with the discoveries of the latest navigators.* In such matters Shakspeare is only faithful in the historical subjects of his own country. In the novels on which he worked, he avoided disturbing his audience to whom they were known, by the correction of errors in secondary things. The more wonderful the story, the more it ranged in a purely poetical region, which he transfers at will to an indefinite distance. These plays, whatever names they bear, took place in the true land of romance and in the century of wonderful love stories. He knew well that in the forest of Ardennes, there were neither the lions and serpents of the torrid zone, nor the

* *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*—Act. iii. Sc. ii.

shepherdesses of Arcadia: but he transferred both to it,* because the design and import of his picture required them. Here he considered himself entitled to the greatest liberties. He had not to do with a petty hypercritical age like ours, which is always seeking in poetry for something else than poetry; his audience entered the theatre, not to learn true chronology, geography, natural history, but to witness a vivid exhibition. I undertake to prove that Shakspeare's anachronisms are, for the most part, committed purposely, and after great consideration. It was frequently of importance to him to bring the subject exhibited, from the back ground of time, quite near to us. Hence in Hamlet, though avowedly an old northern story, there prevails the tone of modish society, and in every respect the costume of the most recent period. Without those circumstantialities it would not have been allowable to make a philosophical inquirer of Hamlet, on which however the sense of the whole is made to rest. On that account he mentions his education at a university, though in the age of the historical Hamlet there was not yet any university. He makes him study at Wittenberg, and no selection could be more suitable. The name was very popular: from the story of Dr. Faustus, of Wittenberg it was wonderfully well known; it was of particular celebrity in protestant England, as Luther had taught and written there shortly before, and the very name must have immediately suggested the idea of freedom in thinking. I cannot even consider it an anachronism that Richard the Third should speak of Macchiavel. The word is here used altogether proverbially: the contents of the book of the prince have been in existence even since the existence of tyrants; Macchiavel was merely the first to commit them to writing.

That Shakspeare has accurately hit the essential costume, namely, the spirit of ages and nations, is at least generally acknowledged by the English critics; but many sins against the external costume may be easily remarked. Here we must bear in mind that the Roman pieces were acted upon the stage of that day in the European dress. This was, it is true, still beautiful and noble, not so silly and tasteless as it became towards the end of the seventeenth century. Brutus and Cassius appeared in the Spanish cloak; they wore, quite contrary to the Roman custom, the sword by their side in time of peace, and drew it, according to the testimony of an eye-witness† in the dialogue where Brutus stimulates Cassius to the conspiracy, as if involuntarily, half out

* *As You Like It*,

† In one of the commendatory poems in the first folio edition:
And on the stage at half sword parley were
Brutus and Cassius.

of the sheath. This will in no wise answer our way of thinking: we are not contented without the Toga. The present may not be an unsuitable place for delivering a general observation respecting costume, considered with reference to art. It has never been more accurately observed than in the present day; art has become a pedantic antiquity slop-shop. This is because we live in a learned and critical, but by no means poetical age. The ancients used to represent the religions of other nations, which deviated very much from their own, according to the Greek mythology. In sculpture the same dress, namely, the Phrygian, was adopted, once for all, for every barbaric tribe. Not that they did not know that there were as many different dresses as nations; but in art they merely wished to acknowledge the great contrast between barbarian and cultivated: and this appeared to them to be rendered most advantageously visible in the Phrygian clothing. The more early Christian painters represent the Saviour, the Virgin Mary, the Patriarchs, and Apostles in an ideal dress; but the subordinate actors or spectators of the action, in the dresses of their own nation and age. Here they were guided by a correct feeling: the mysteriously sacred ought to be kept in an awe-inspiring distance, but the human can only be properly understood when seen with the usual accompaniments. In the middle ages all heroical stories of antiquity, from Theseus and Achilles down to Alexander, were metamorphosed into true books of chivalry. What was related to themselves alone spoke an intelligible language to them; of differences and distinctions they did not wish to know. In an old manuscript of the Trojan war, I saw a miniature picture representing the funeral procession of Hector, where the coffin, hung with noble coats of arms, is carried into a Gothic church. It is easy to make ourselves merry with this piece of simplicity, but a reflecting mind will view the subject in a very different light. A powerful consciousness of the universal prevalency and the solid consistency of their manner of being, an undoubted conviction that it has always so been and will continue so to be in the world: these feelings of our ancestors were symptoms of the fresh fulness of life; they were the marrow of action in real life as well as in poetry. Their plain and affectionate attachment to everything around them, handed down from their fathers, is by no means to be confounded with the ostreperous vanity of ages of mannerism, which vainly introduce the fleeting modes and fashion of the day into art, because everything like a noble simplicity, seems to them boorish and rude. This last impropriety is now abolished: our poets and artists must, like servants, wear the livery of distant centuries and foreign nations if they would hope for our approbation. We

are everywhere at home, except at home. We do ourselves the justice to allow that the present mode of dressing, forms of politeness, &c. are altogether unpoetical, and art is therefore obliged to beg, as an alms, a poetical costume from the antiquaries. To that simple way of thinking, which is merely attentive to the inward truth of the composition without stumbling at anachronisms, or other external inconsistencies, we cannot, alas! now return; but we must envy the poets to whom they occurred; they allowed them a great breadth and freedom in the handling of their subjects.

Many things in Shakspeare must be judged of according to the above principles, respecting the essential and the merely learned costume; and they will also admit of an application to Calderon.

So much with respect to the spirit of the age in which Shakspeare lived, and his peculiar cultivation and knowledge. To me he appears a profound artist, and not a blind and wildly luxuriant genius. I consider, generally speaking, all that has been said on this subject as a mere fabulous story, a blind and extravagant error. In other arts the assertion refutes itself; for in them acquired knowledge is an indispensable condition before anything can be performed. But even in such poets, as are usually given out for careless pupils of nature, without any art or school discipline, I have always found, on a nearer consideration, when they have really produced works of excellence, a distinguished cultivation of the mental powers, practice in art, and views worthy in themselves and maturely considered. This applies to Homer as well as Dante. The activity of genius is, it is true, natural to it, and in a certain sense unconscious; and consequently the person who possesses it is not always at the moment able to render an account of the course which he may have pursued; but it by no means follows that the thinking power had not a great share in it. It is from the very rapidity and certainty of the mental process, from the utmost clearness of understanding, that thinking in a poet is not perceived as something abstracted, does not wear the appearance of meditation* (after thought). That idea of poetical inspiration, which many lyrical poets have brought into circulation, as if they were not in their senses, and like Pythia, when possessed by the divinity, delivered oracles unintelligible to them-

* The word in the original is equivalent to meditation; *nachdenken* is composed of two words, *nach* after, and *denken* to think, and literally means *after-thinking*. The analogy does not hold in our language. Meditate is derived from *meditor*, and that from the Greek *μελετάω* (*curam gero*). The farthest back we can go is *μελεω*. The word reflection however, in Latin, means primarily to bend, or turn back.—TRANS.

selves (a mere lyrical invention), is least of all applicable to dramatic composition, one of the productions of the human mind which requires the greatest exercise of thought. It is admitted that Shakspeare has reflected, and deeply reflected, on character and passion, on the progress of events and human destinies, on the human constitution, on all the things and relations of the world; this is an admission which must be made, for one alone of thousands of his maxims would be a sufficient refutation of whoever should attempt to deny it. So that it was only then respecting the structure of his own pieces that he had no thought to spare? This he left to the dominion of chance, which blew together the atoms of Epicurus? But supposing that he had, without the higher ambition of acquiring the approbation of judicious critics and posterity, without the love of art which endeavours at self-satisfaction in a perfect work, merely laboured to please the unlettered crowd; this very object alone and the theatrical effect, would have led him to bestow attention to the conduct of his pieces. For does not the impression of a drama depend in an especial manner on the relation of the parts to each other? And however beautiful a scene may be in itself, will it not be at once reprobated by spectators merely possessed of plain sense who give themselves up to nature, whenever it is at variance with what they are led to expect at that particular place, and destroys the interest which they have already begun to take? The comic intermixtures may be considered as a sort of interlude, for the purpose of refreshing the spectators after the straining of their minds in following the more serious parts, if no better purpose can be found for them; but in the progress of the main action, in the concatenation of the events, the poet must, if possible, display even more superiority of understanding than in the composition of individual character and situations, otherwise he would be like the conductor of a puppet-show who has confused the wires, so that the puppets, from their mechanism, undergo quite different movements from those which he actually intended.

The English critics are unanimous in their praise of the truth and uniform consistency of his characters, of his heart-rending pathos, and his comic wit. Moreover, they extol the beauty and sublimity of his separate descriptions, images, and expressions. This last is the most superficial and cheap mode of criticising works of art. Johnson compares him, who should endeavour to recommend this poet by passages unconnectedly torn from his works, to the pedant in Hierocles, who exhibited a brick as a sample of his house. And yet he himself speaks so little, and so very unsatisfactorily, of the pieces considered as a whole! Let any man, for instance, bring together the short characters which

he gives at the close of each play, and see if the aggregate will amount to that sum of admiration which he himself, at his outset, has stated as the correct standard for the appreciation of the poet. It was, generally speaking, the prevailing tendency of the time which preceded our own; a tendency displayed also in physical science, to consider what is possessed of life as a mere accumulation of dead parts, to separate what exists only in connexion and cannot otherwise be conceived, instead of penetrating to the central point and viewing all the parts as so many irradiations from it. Hence nothing is so rare as a critic who can elevate himself to the contemplation of an extensive work of art. Shakspeare's compositions, from the very depth of purpose displayed in them, have been exposed to the misfortune of being misunderstood. Besides, this prosaical species of criticism applies always the poetical form to the details of execution; but in so far as the plan of the piece is concerned, it never looks for more than the logical connexion of causes and effects, or some partial and trivial moral by way of application; and all that cannot be reconciled to this is declared a superfluous, or even a detrimental, addition. On these principles we must equally strike out the most of the choral songs of the Greek tragedies, which also contribute nothing to the developement of the action, but are merely an harmonious echo of the impressions aimed at by the poet. In this they altogether mistake the rights of poetry and the nature of the romantic drama, which, for the very reason that it is and ought to be picturesque, requires richer accompaniments and contrasts for its main groupes. In all art and poetry, but more especially in the romantic, the fancy lays claims to be considered as an independent mental power governed according to its own laws.

In an essay on *Romeo and Juliet*,* written a number of years ago, I went through the whole of the scenes in their order, and demonstrated the inward necessity of each with reference to the whole; I showed why such a particular circle of characters and relations was placed around the two lovers; I explained the signification of the mirth here and there scattered, and justified the use of the occasional heightening given to the poetical colours. From all this it seemed to follow unquestionably, that with the exception of a few plays of wit now become unintelligible or foreign to the present taste, (imitations of the tone of society of that day) nothing could be taken away, nothing added, nothing otherwise arranged, without mutilating and disfiguring the perfect work. I should be ready to undertake the same thing in all the pieces of

* In the first volume of *Charakteristiken und Kritiken*, published by my brother and myself.

Shakspeare produced in his maturer years, but this would require a separate book. Here I am reduced to confine my observations to the tracing his great designs with a rapid pencil; but still I must previously be allowed to deliver my sentiments in a general manner on the subject of his most distinguishing properties.

Shakspeare's knowledge of mankind has become proverbial: in this his superiority is so great, that he has justly been called the master of the human heart. A readiness in remarking even the nicer involuntary demonstrations of the mind, and the expressing with certainty the meaning of these signs acquired from experience and reflection, constitutes the observer of men; acuteness in drawing still farther conclusions from them, and in arranging the separate observations according to grounds of probability in a connected manner, may be said to be knowing men. The distinguishing property of the dramatic poet who is great in characterization is something altogether different from this, which either, take it which way we will, includes in it this readiness, and this acuteness, or dispenses with both. It is the capability of transporting himself so completely into every situation, even the most unusual, that he is enabled, as plenipotentiary of the whole human race, without particular instructions for each separate case, to act and speak in the name of every individual. It is the power of endowing the creatures of his imagination with such self-existent energy, that they afterwards act in each conjuncture according to general laws of nature: the poet, in his dreams, institutes as it were experiments which are received with as much authority as if they had been made on real objects. The inconceivable in this, and what never can be learned, is, that the characters appear neither to do nor to say anything on account of the spectator; and yet that the poet, by means of the exhibition itself without any subsidiary explanation, communicates the gift of looking into the inmost recesses of their minds. Hence Goëthe has ingeniously compared Shakspeare's characters to watches with crystalline plates and cases, which, while they point out the hours as correctly as other watches, enable us at the same time to perceive the inward springs whereby all this is accomplished.

Nothing, however, is more foreign to Shakspeare, than a certain dissecting mode of composition, which laboriously enumerates to us all the motives by which a man is determined to act in this or that particular manner. This way of accounting for motives, the rage of many of the modern historians, might be carried at length to an extent which would abolish everything like individuality, and resolve all character into nothing but the effect of foreign or external influences, while we know that it frequently announces itself in the most decided manner in the earliest infancy.

After all, a man acts so because he is so. And how each man is constituted, Shakspeare reveals to us in the most immediate manner: he demands and obtains our belief, even for what is singular, and deviates from the ordinary course of nature. Never perhaps was there so comprehensive a talent for characterization as Shakspeare. It not only grasps the diversities of rank, sex, and age, down to the dawning of infancy; not only do the king and the beggar, the hero and the pickpocket, the sage and the idiot, speak and act with equal truth; not only does he transport himself to distant ages and foreign nations, and portray in the most accurate manner, with only a few apparent violations of costume, the spirit of the ancient Romans, of the French in their wars with the English, of the English themselves during a great part of their history, of the Southern Europeans (in the serious part of many comedies), the cultivated society of that time, and the former rude and barbarous state of the North; his human characters have not only such depth and precision that they cannot be arranged under classes, and are inexhaustible even in conception: no, this Prometheus not merely forms men, he opens the gates of the magical world of spirits, calls up the midnight ghosts, exhibits before us his witches amidst their unhallowed mysteries, peoples the air with sportive fairies and sylphs; and these beings existing only in imagination possess such truth and consistency, that even when deformed monsters like Caliban, he extorts the assenting conviction, if there should be such beings they would so conduct themselves. In a word, as he carries with him the most fruitful and daring fancy into the kingdom of nature, on the other hand, he carries nature into the regions of fancy, lying beyond the confines of reality. We are lost in astonishment at seeing the extraordinary, the wonderful, and the unheard of, in such intimate nearness.

Pope and Johnson appear to contradict each other in a singular manner, when the first says, all the characters of Shakspeare are individuals, and the second, they are species. And yet perhaps these opinions may admit of reconciliation. Pope's expression is unquestionably the more correct. A character which should merely be a personification of a naked general idea could neither exhibit any great depth nor any great variety. The names of genera and species are well known to be merely auxiliaries for the understanding, that we may embrace the infinite variety of nature in a certain order. The characters which Shakspeare has thoroughly delineated possess undoubtedly a number of individual peculiarities, but at the same time a signification which is not applicable to them alone: they generally supply materials for a profound theory of their distinguishing property. But even with

the above correction, this opinion must still have its limitation. Characterization is merely one ingredient of the dramatic art, and not dramatic poetry itself. It would be improper in the extreme, if the poet were to draw our attention to superfluous traits of character, when he ought to endeavour to produce other impressions. Whenever the musical or the fanciful preponderate, the characteristical is necessarily thrown into the back ground. Hence many of the figures of Shakspeare, exhibit merely external designations, determined by the place which they occupy in the whole: they are like secondary persons in a public procession, to whose physiognomy we seldom pay much attention; their only importance is derived from the solemnity of their dress and the object in which they are engaged. Shakspeare's messengers, for instance, are for the most part merely messengers, yet not common, but poetical messengers: the messages which they have to bring is the soul which suggests to them their language. Other voices too are merely raised as melodious lamentations or rejoicings, or reflections on what has taken place; and in a serious drama without chorus this must always be more or less the case if we would not have it prosaical.

2) If Shakspeare deserves our admiration for his characters, he is equally deserving of it for his exhibition of passion, taking this word in its widest signification, as including every mental condition, every tone from indifference or familiar mirth to the wildest rage and despair. He gives us the history of minds; he lays open to us, in a single word, a whole series of preceding conditions. His passions do not at first stand displayed to us in all their height, as is the case with so many tragic poets who, in the language of Lessing, are thorough masters of the legal style of love. He paints, in a most inimitable manner, the gradual progress from the first origin; "he gives," as Lessing says, "a living picture of all the most minute and secret artifices by which a feeling steals into our souls, of all the imperceptible advantages which it there gains, of all the stratagems by which every other passion is made subservient to it, till it becomes the sole tyrant of our desires and our aversions." Of all poets, perhaps, he alone has portrayed the mental diseases, melancholy, delirium, lunacy, with such inexpressible and, in every respect, definite truth, that the physician may enrich his observations from them in the same manner as from real cases.

And yet Johnson has objected to Shakspeare that his pathos is not always natural and free from affectation. There are, it is true, passages, though comparatively speaking very few, where his poetry exceeds the bounds of true dialogue, where a too soaring imagination, a too luxuriant wit, rendered the complete dramatic

forgetfulness of himself impossible. With this exception, the censure originates only in a fanciless way of thinking, to which everything appears unnatural that does not suit its tame insipidity. Hence an idea has been formed of simple and natural pathos, which consists in exclamations destitute of imagery and nowise elevated above everyday life. But energetical passions electrify the whole of the mental powers, and will consequently, in highly favoured natures, express themselves in an ingenious and figurative manner. It has often been remarked that indignation gives wit; and as despair occasionally breaks out into laughter, it may sometimes also give vent to itself in antithetical comparisons.

Besides, the rights of the poetical form have not been duly weighed. Shakspeare, who was always sure of his object, to move in a sufficiently powerful manner when he wished to do so, has occasionally, by indulging in a freer play, purposely moderated the impressions when too painful, and immediately introduced a musical alleviation of our sympathy.* He had not those rude ideas of his art which many moderns seem to have, as if the poet, like the clown in the proverb, must strike twice on the same place. An ancient rhetorician delivered a caution against dwelling too long on the excitation of pity; for nothing, he said, dries so soon as tears; and Shakspeare acted conformably to this ingenious maxim without knowing it. The paradoxical assertion of Johnson that Shakspeare had a greater talent for comedy than tragedy, and that in the latter he has frequently displayed an affected tone, does not even deserve to be so far noticed that we should adduce, by way of refutation, the great tragical compositions of the poet which, for overpowering effect, leave almost everything which the stage has yet seen far behind them; a few of the much less celebrated scenes would be quite sufficient. What might to many readers lend an appearance of truth to this opinion are the plays on words, which, not unfrequently in Shakspeare, are introduced into serious and sublime passages, and into those also of a peculiarly pathetic nature. I have already stated the point of view in which we ought to consider the sportive plays on words. I shall here, therefore, merely deliver a few observations respecting a play on words in general, and its poetical use.—A thorough investigation would lead us too far from our subject, and too deeply into considerations on the essence of language, and its relation to poetry or rhyme, &c. There is in the human mind a desire that

* A contemporary of the poet, the author of the poem before alluded to, tenderly felt this while he says:—

Yet so to temper passion, that our ears
Take pleasure in their pain, and eyes in tears
Both smile and weep.

language should exhibit the object which it denotes in a sensible manner by sound, which may be traced even as far back as the origin of poetry. As, in the shape in which language comes down to us, this is seldom the case in a perceptible degree, an imagination which has been powerfully excited is fond of laying hold of the congruity in sound which may accidentally offer itself, that by such means he may, in a single case, restore the lost resemblance between the word and the thing. For example, it was common to seek in the name of a person, though often accidentally bestowed, a reference to his qualities and fortune,—it was purposely converted into an expressive name. Those who cry out against plays on words as an unnatural and affected invention only betray their own ignorance. With children as well as nations of the most simple manners, a great inclination to them is often displayed, as correct ideas respecting the derivation and affinity of words have not been developed among them, and do not consequently stand in the way of this caprice. In *Homer* we find several examples; the *Books of Moses*, the oldest written memorial of the primitive world, are, as is well known, full of them. On the other hand, poets of a very cultivated taste, or orators like Cicero, have delighted in them. Whoever, in *Richard the Second*, is disgusted with the affecting play of words of the dying John of Gaunt on his own name, let him remember that the same thing occurs in the *Ajax* of Sophocles. We do not mean to say that all plays on words are on all occasions to be justified. This must depend on the disposition of mind, whether it will admit of such a play of fancy, and whether the sallies, comparisons, and allusions, which lie at the bottom of them, possess internal solidity. Yet we must not proceed upon the principle of trying how the thought appears after it is deprived of the resemblance in sound, any more than we are to endeavour to feel the charm of rhymed versification after being deprived of rhyme. The laws of good taste on this subject must also vary with the quality of the languages. In those which possess a great number of homonyms, that is, words possessing the same, or nearly the same sound, though quite different in their derivation and signification, it is almost more difficult to avoid than to fall on plays of words. It has also been dreaded lest a door might be opened to puerile witticism, if they were not proscribed in the most severe manner. I cannot find, however, that Shakspeare had such an invincible and immoderate passion for plays on words. It is true he often makes a most lavish use of this figure; in other pieces he has introduced it very sparingly; and in some of them, for example in *Macbeth*, I do not believe that the least vestige of it is to be found. Hence, in respect to the use or the rejection of plays on words,

he must have been guided by the measure of the objects, and the different style in which they required to be treated, and have followed probably, as in everything else, principles which would bear a strict examination.

The objection that Shakspeare wounds our feelings by the open display of the most disgusting moral odiousness, harrows up the mind unmercifully, and tortures even our eyes by the exhibition of the most insupportable and hateful spectacles, is one of much greater importance. He has never, in fact, varnished over wild and blood-thirsty passions with a pleasing exterior, never clothed crime and want of principle with a false show of greatness of soul, and in that respect he is every way deserving of praise. Twice he has portrayed downright villains, and the masterly way in which he has contrived to elude impressions of too painful a nature may be seen in Iago and Richard the Third. I allow that the reading, and still more the sight, of some of his pieces are not advisable to weak nerves, any more than the *Eumenides* of Æschylus; but is the poet, who can only reach an important object by bold and hazardous means, to allow himself to be influenced by considerations for persons of this description? If the effeminacy of the present day is to serve as a general standard of what tragical composition may exhibit to human nature, we shall be forced to set very narrow limits to art, and everything like a powerful effect must at once be renounced. If we wish to have a grand purpose, we must also wish to have the means, and our nerves should in some measure accommodate themselves to painful impressions when, by way of requital, our mind is thereby elevated and strengthened.—The constant reference to a petty and puny race must cripple the boldness of the poet. Fortunately for his art, Shakspeare lived in an age extremely susceptible of noble and tender impressions, but which had still enough of the firmness inherited from a vigorous olden time, not to shrink back with dismay from every strong and violent picture. We have lived to see tragedies of which the catastrophe consists of the swoon of an enamoured princess: if Shakspeare falls occasionally into the opposite extreme, it is a noble error originating in the fulness of a gigantic strength. And this tragical Titan, who storms the heavens and threatens to tear the world from off its hinges, who, more fruitful than Æschylus, makes our hair stand on end, and congeals our blood with horror, possessed at the same time the insinuating loveliness of the sweetest poetry; he plays with love like a child, and his songs are breathed out like melting sighs. He unites in his existence the utmost elevation and the utmost depth; and the most foreign, and even apparently irreconcilable properties subsist in him peaceably together. The

world of spirits and nature have laid all their treasures at his feet: in strength a demi-god, in profundity of view a prophet, in all-seeing wisdom a protecting spirit of the higher order, he lowers himself to mortals as if unconscious of his superiority, and is as open and unassuming as a child.

If the delineation of all his characters, separately considered, is inimitably firm and correct, he surpasses even himself in so combining and contrasting them, that they serve to bring out each other.—This is the very summit of dramatic characterization: for we can never estimate a man altogether abstractedly by himself according to his true worth; we must see him in his relations with others; and it is here that most dramatic poets are deficient. Shakspeare makes each of his principal characters the glass in which the others are reflected, and in which we are enabled to discover what could not be immediately revealed to us. What in others is most profound, lies in him at the surface. We should be very ill advised were we always to take the declarations of the characters respecting themselves and others for sterling gold. Ambiguity of intention, very properly in him, overflows with the most praiseworthy principles; and sage maxims are not unfrequently put in the mouth of imbecility, to show how easily such common place truisms may be acquired. Nobody ever painted as he has done the facility of self-deception, the half self-conscious hypocrisy towards ourselves, with which even noble minds attempt to disguise the almost inevitable influence of selfish motives in human nature. This secret irony of the characterization is deserving of admiration as a storehouse of acuteness and sagacity; but it is the grave of enthusiasm. But this is the conclusion at which we arrive when we had the misfortune to see human nature through and through; and besides the melancholy truth that no virtue and greatness are altogether pure and genuine, and the dangerous error that the highest perfection is attainable, we have no remaining choice. Here we may perceive, notwithstanding his power in exciting the most fervent emotions, a certain cool indifference in the poet himself, but still the indifference of a superior mind, which has run through the circle of human existence and survived feeling.

The irony in Shakspeare has not merely a reference to the separate characters, but frequently to the whole of the action. Most poets who portray human events in a narrative or dramatic form take themselves a part, and exact from their readers a blind approbation or condemnation of whatever side they choose to support or oppose. The more zealous this rhetoric is, the more easily it fails of its effect. In every case we perceive that the subject does not come immediately before us, but that we view it

through the medium of a different way of thinking. When, however, the poet, by a dexterous manœuvre, occasionally allows us a glance of the less brilliant reverse of the picture, he then places himself in a sort of secret understanding with the select circle of the intelligent among his readers or spectators; he shows them that he previously saw and admitted the validity of their objections; that he himself is not tied down by the subject represented, but soars *freely* above it; and that, if he chose, he could unrelentingly annihilate the beautiful and irresistibly attractive scenes which his magic pen has produced. Wherever the proper tragic enters, it is true, everything like irony immediately ceases; but from the avowed raillery of comedy, to the point where the subjection of mortal beings to an inevitable destiny demands the highest degree of seriousness, there are a multitude of human relations which unquestionably may be considered in an ironical view, without confounding the eternal line of separation between good and evil. This purpose is answered by the comic characters and scenes which are interwoven in the most of Shakspeare's pieces where romantic fables or historical events are made the subject of a noble and elevating exhibition. A determinate parody of the serious part is frequently not to be mistaken in them; at other times the connexion is more loose and arbitrary, and the more wonderful the invention of the whole, the more easily it becomes merely a light delusion of the fancy. The comic interruptions everywhere serve to prevent the play from being converted into an employment, to preserve the mind in the possession of its hilarity, and to keep off that gloomy and inert seriousness which so easily steals into the sentimental, but not tragical, drama. Most assuredly Shakspeare did not wish in this to comply with the taste of the multitude contrary to his own better judgment: for in various pieces, and in considerable parts of others, especially when the catastrophe approaches, and the minds are consequently more on the stretch and no longer susceptible of any entertainment serving to divert their attention, he has abstained from all comic intermixtures. It was also an object with him, that the clowns or buffoons should not occupy a more important place than that which he had assigned them: he expressly condemns the extemporizing with which they loved to enlarge their parts.* Johnson founds the justification of their species of drama in which seriousness and mirth are mixed, on this, that in real life the vulgar is found close to the sublime, that the merry and the sad usually accompany and succeed one another. But it does not follow that because both are found together, they must

* In Hamlet's directions to the players.

not therefore be separated in the compositions of art. The observation is in no respect just, and this circumstance invests the poet with a power to proceed in that manner, because everything in the drama must be regulated by the conditions of theatrical probability; but the mixture of such dissimilar, and apparently contradictory, ingredients, in the same works, can only be justifiable on principles reconcilable with the views of art, which I have already described. In the dramas of Shakspeare the comic scenes are the antechamber of the poetry, where the servants remain; these prosaical associates must not give such an extension of their voice as to deafen the speakers in the hall itself; however, in those intervals when the ideal society has retired they deserve to be listened to; the boldness of their raillery, the pretension of their imitations, may afford us many a conclusion respecting the relations of their masters.

Shakspeare's comic talent is equally wonderful with that which he has shown in the pathetic and tragic: it stands on an equal elevation, and possesses equal extent and profundity; all that I before wished was, not to admit that the former preponderated. He is highly inventive in comic situations and motives: it will be hardly possible to show whence he has taken any of them; whereas in the serious part of his dramas he has generally laid hold of something already known. His comic characterization is equally true, various, and profound, with his serious. So little is he disposed to caricature, that we may rather say many of his traits are almost too nice and delicate for the stage, that they can only be properly siezed by a great actor, and fully understood by a very acute audience. Not only has he delineated many kinds of folly, he has also contrived to exhibit mere stupidity in a most diverting and entertaining manner. There is also a peculiar species of the farcical to be found in his pieces, which seems to us to be introduced in a more arbitrary manner, but which, however, is founded in imitation of an actual custom. This is the introduction of the buffoon; the fool with his cap and motley dress, called in English, *Clown*, who appears in several comedies though not in all, but in *Learn* alone of the tragedies, and who generally exercises his wit merely in conversation with the principal persons, though he is also sometimes incorporated with the action. In those times it was not only usual for princes to keep court-fools, but in many distinguished families they retained, along with other servants, such an exhilarating house-mate as a good antidote against the insipidity and wearisomeness of ordinary life, as a welcome interruption of established formalities. Great men, and even churchmen, did not consider it beneath their dignity to recruit and solace themselves after important concerns with the

conversation of their fools; the celebrated Sir Thomas More had his fool painted along with himself by Holbein. Shakspeare appears to have lived immediately before the time when the custom began to be abolished; in the English comic authors who succeeded him the clown is no longer to be found. The dismissal of the fool has been extolled as a proof of refinement; and our honest forefathers have been pitied for taking delight in such a coarse and farcical entertainment. I am much rather however disposed to believe, that the practice was dropped from the difficulty in finding fools able to do full justice to their parts;* on the other hand, reason, with all its conceit of itself, has become too timid to tolerate such bold irony; it is always careful lest the mantle of its gravity should be disturbed in any of its folds; and rather than allow a privileged place to folly beside itself, it has unconsciously assumed the part of the ridiculous; but, alas! a heavy and cheerless ridicule.† It would be easy to make a collection of the excellent sallies and biting sarcasms which have been preserved of celebrated court-fools. It is well known that they frequently told such truths to princes as are never now told to them.‡ Shakspeare's fools, along with somewhat of an overstraining for wit, which cannot altogether be avoided when wit becomes a separate profession, have for the most part an incomparable humour, and

* See Hamlet's praise of Yorick.—In *The Twelfth Night*, Viola says:—

This fellow is wise enough to play the fool;
And to do that well craves a kind of wit;
He must observe their mood on whom he jests
The quality of the persons, and the time;
And like the haggard, check at every feather
That comes before his eye. This is a practice
As full of labour as a wise man's art:
For folly that he wisely shows is fit,
But wise men's folly fall'n quite taints their wit.

AUTHOR.

The passages from Shakspeare, in the original work, are given from the author's masterly translation. We may be allowed however to observe, that the last line,

“Doch wozu ist des Weisen Thorheit nutz?”

literally, *Of what use is the folly of the wise?* does not convey the exact meaning of Shakspeare.—TRANS.

† “Since the little wit that fools have was silenced, the little foolery that wise men have makes a greater show.”—*As you Like it*, Act i. Scene 2.

‡ Charles the Bold, of Burgundy, is known to have frequently boasted that he wished to rival Hannibal as the greatest general of all ages. After his defeat at Granson his fool accompanied him in his hurried flight, and exclaimed, “Ah, your Grace, they have for once Hanniballed us!” If the Duke had given an ear to this warning raillery, he would not so soon afterwards have come to a disgraceful end.

an infinite abundance of intellect, enough to supply a whole host of ordinary wise men.

I have still a few observations to make on the diction and versification of our poet. The language is here and there somewhat obsolete, but on the whole much less so than the most of the writers of that day, a sufficient proof of the goodness of his choice. Prose had yet been but little cultivated, as the learned generally wrote in Latin: a favourable circumstance for the dramatic poet; for what has he to do with the scientific language of books? He had not only read, but studied the earlier English poets; but he drew his language immediately from life, and he possessed a masterly skill in blending the dialogical element with the highest poetical elevation. I know not what certain critics mean, when they say that Shakspeare is frequently ungrammatical. To make out this affirmation, they must prove that similar constructions never occur in his contemporaries, the direct contrary of which can be established. In no language is every thing determined on principle, much is always left to the caprice of custom; and because this has since changed, do they wish to make the poet answerable for it? The English language had not then attained that correct insipidity which has been introduced into the more recent literature of the country, to the prejudice, perhaps, of its originality. As a field when first brought under the plough produces, along with the fertile shoots, many luxuriant weeds, we shall also find that the poetical diction of that day run occasionally out into extravagance, but an extravagance, originating in the fulness of its strength. We may still perceive traces of a want of assistance, but nowhere of a laborious and spiritless display of art. In general Shakspeare's style yet remains the very best model, both in the vigorous and sublime, and the pleasing and tender. In his sphere he has exhausted all the means of language. On all, the stamp of his mighty spirit is impressed. His images and figures, in their unsought for, nay, unarbitrary singularity, have often a sweetness altogether peculiar. He becomes occasionally obscure from too great fondness for the most compressed brevity; but the poring over Shakspeare's lines affords us an ample requital for our labour.

The verse of all his plays is generally the rhymeless iambic of ten or eleven syllables, occasionally only intermixed with rhymes, but more frequently alternating with prose. No one piece is wholly written in prose; for even in those which approach the most to the pure comedy, there is always something added which elevates them to a higher rank than belongs to this species. Many scenes are wholly prosaic, in others discourses in verse and prose succeed each other alternately. This can on-

ly appear an impropriety in the eyes of those who are accustomed to consider the lines of a drama like so many soldiers drawn up rank and file on a parade, with the same uniform, arms, and accoutrements, so that when we see one or two we may represent to ourselves thousands as being every way like them.

In the use of verse and prose Shakspeare observes very nice distinctions according to the ranks of the speakers, but still more according to their characters and disposition of mind. A noble language, elevated above the usual tone, is only suitable to a certain decorum of manners, which is thrown over both vices and virtues, and which does not even wholly disappear amidst the violence of passion. If this is not exclusively possessed by the higher ranks, it still however belongs naturally more to them than to the lower; and therefore in Shakspeare dignity and familiarity of language, poetry, and prose, are in this manner distributed among the characters. Hence his tradesmen, peasants, soldiers, sailors, servants, but more especially his fools and clowns, speak almost without exception, in the tone of their actual life. However, inward dignity of sentiment, wherever it is possessed, does not stand in need of the artificial elegancies of education and custom to display itself in a noble manner; it is a universal right of mankind, of the highest as well as the lowest; and hence also in Shakspeare, the nobility of nature and morality is elevated above that of society. He not unfrequently also makes the very same persons express themselves at times in the most sublime language, and at others in the lowest; and this inequality is in like manner founded in truth. Extraordinary situations, which intensely occupy the head and throw mighty passions, into play, give elevation and tension to the soul: it collects together all its powers, and exhibits an unusual energy, both in its operations and its communications by language. On the other hand, even the greatest men have their moments of remissness, when to a certain degree they forget the dignity of their character in the most unreserved carelessness. This very tone of mind is necessary to admit of their receiving amusement from the jokes of others, or passing jokes themselves, which surely cannot reflect dishonour even on a hero. Let any person, for example, go carefully through the part of Hamlet. How bold and powerful the language of his poetry when he conjures the ghost of his father, when he spurs himself on to the bloody deed, when he thunders into the soul of his mother! How he lowers his tone down to that of common life, when he has to do with persons whose station demands from him such a line of conduct; when he makes game of Polonius and the courtiers, instructs the player, and even enters into the jokes of

the grave-digger. Of all the principal characters of the poet of a serious description there is no one so rich in wit and humour as Hamlet; hence, of all of them he makes the greatest use of the familiar style. Others do not fall into it; either because they are constantly surrounded by the pomp of rank, or because a uniform seriousness is natural to them; or, in short, because they are throughout the whole piece under the dominion of a passion calculated to excite and not depress the mind like the sorrow of Hamlet. The choice of the one form or the other is everywhere so suitable, and so much founded in the nature of the thing, that I will venture to assert, even where the poet in the very same speech makes the speaker leave prose for poetry, or the converse, this could not be altered without the danger of injuring or destroying something or other. The blank verse has this advantage, that its tone may be elevated or lowered; it admits of approximation to the familiar style of conversation, and never forms such an abrupt contrast as that, for example, between plain prose and rhymed Alexandrines.

Shakspeare's iambics are sometimes highly harmonious and full sounding; always varied and suited to the subject, at one time they are distinguished for ease and rapidity, at another they move along with ponderous energy. They never fall out of the dialogical character, which may always be traced even in the continued discourses of individuals, excepting when they run into the lyrical. They are a complete model of the dramatic use of this species of verse, which, in English, since Milton, has been also used in epic poetry; but in the latter it has assumed a quite different turn. Even the irregularities of Shakspeare's versification are expressive; a broken off verse, or a sudden change of rhythmus, is in unison with the pause in the progress of the thought, or the entrance of another disposition of mind. As a proof that he purposely violated the mechanical rules, in the conviction that too symmetrical a versification does not suit with the drama, and has in the long run a tendency on the stage to lull the spectators asleep, we may observe that his earlier pieces are those which he has most diligently versified, and that in the works of a later period, when through practice he must have acquired a greater facility, we find the strongest deviations from the regulated progress of the verse. He was merely enabled by the verse to render the poetical elevation audible, but he claimed it in the utmost possible freedom.

The views or suggestions of feeling by which he was guided in the use of rhyme may be traced with almost equal certainty. Not unfrequently scenes, or even single speeches, close with a few rhymed lines, for the purpose of more strongly marking the di-

vision and of giving it more rounding. This was imitated in an injudicious manner by the English tragic poets of a later period; they suddenly elevated the tone in the rhymed lines, as if the person began all at once to speak in another language. The practice was hailed by the actors from its serving as a signal for clapping when they made their exit. In Shakspeare again the transitions are more easy: all changes of forms are introduced imperceptibly, and as if of themselves. Moreover, he generally loves to elevate a series of ingenious and antithetical sayings by the use of rhyme. We find other passages in continued rhyme, where solemnity and theatrical pomp were suitable, as in the mask,* as it is called, in the *Tempest*, and in the play introduced into Hamlet. In other pieces, for instance the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, the rhyme constitutes a considerable part; because he wished to give them a glowing colour; or because the characters utter in a musical tone their love complaints or love suits. Here he has even introduced rhymed strophes, which approach to the form of the sonnet then usual in England. The assertion of Malone that Shakspeare in his youth was fond of rhyme, but that he afterwards rejected it, is sufficiently refuted by his own chronology of the poet's works. In some of the earliest, for instance in the Second and Third part of *Henry the Sixth*, there are hardly any rhymes; in what is stated to be his last piece, *The Twelfth Night, or what You will*, and in *Macbeth*, which is proved to have been composed under the reign of King James, we find them in no inconsiderable number. Even in the secondary matters of form Shakspeare was not guided by humour and accident, but acted like a genuine artist on solid grounds. This might also be shown in the kinds of verse which he least often used; for instance, in the rhymed verses of seven and eight syllables, were we not afraid of dwelling too long on merely technical peculiarities.

The manner of handling rhymed verse, and the opinion respecting its harmony and elegance have undergone a much greater change in England in the course of two centuries than has been the case in the rhymeless iambic or blank verse. In the former, Dryden and Pope have become models; these writers have communicated the utmost smoothing to rhyme, but they have also tied it down to a harmonious uniformity. A foreigner, to whom antiquated and new are the same, may perhaps feel with greater freedom the advantages of the more ancient manner. Certain it is, the rhyme of the present day, from the too great con-

* I shall take the opportunity of saying a few words respecting this species of drama when I come to speak of Ben Johnson.

finement of the couplet, is unfit for the drama. We must ~~not~~ estimate the rhyme of Shakspeare by the mode of subsequent times, but by a comparison with his contemporaries or with Spenser. The comparison will without doubt turn out to his advantage. Spenser is often diffuse; Shakspeare, though sometimes hard, is always brief and vigorous. He has much more frequently been induced by the rhyme to leave out something necessary than to insert anything superfluous. Many of his rhymes however are yet faultless: ingenious with attractive ease, and rich without false brilliancy. The songs interspersed (namely, those of the poet himself) are generally sweetly playful and altogether musical; we hear in imagination their melody while we merely read them.

The whole of Shakspeare's productions bear the certain stamp of his original genius, but yet no writer was ever farther removed from everything like a manner acquired from habit and personal peculiarities. He is rather, from the diversity of tone and colour, which he assumes according to the qualities of objects, a true Proteus. Each of his compositions is like a world of itself, which moves in its own sphere. They are works of art, finished in the most consummate style, in which the freedom and judicious choice of their author are revealed. If the thorough formation of a work, even in its minutest parts, according to a leading idea; if the dominion of the animating spirit over all the means of execution deserves the name of correctness (and this, excepting in matters of grammar, is the only proper sense of the word); we shall then, after allowing to Shakspeare all the higher qualities which demand our admiration, be also compelled, in most cases, to allow him the name of a correct poet.

It would be instructive in the highest degree, could we follow, step by step in his career, an author who at once founded and carried his art to perfection, and to go through his works in the order of time. But, with the exception of a few fixed points, which at length have been obtained, we are here in want of the necessary materials. The diligent Malone has indeed made an attempt to arrange the plays of Shakspeare in chronological order; but he himself only gives it out for hypothetical, and it could not possibly be attended with complete success, as he excludes from his research a considerable number of pieces which have been ascribed to the poet, though rejected as spurious by all the editors since Rowe, but which, in my opinion, must, if not wholly, at least in a great measure be attributed to him.*

* Were this book destined immediately for an English public, I should not have hazarded an opinion like this at variance with that which is generally received, without supporting it by proofs. The investigation however is too ex-

The best and easiest mode therefore of reviewing the dramas will be to arrange them in classes. This, it must be owned, is merely a last shift: several critics have declared that all Shakspeare's pieces substantially belong to the same species, although sometimes one ingredient, sometimes another, the musical or the characteristical, the invention of the wonderful or the imitation of the real, the pathetic or the comic, seriousness or irony, may preponderate in the mixture. Shakspeare himself, it would appear, only laughed at the petty endeavours of many critics to find out divisions and subdivisions of species, and to hedge in what had been so separated with the most anxious care; the pedantic Polonius in *Hamlet* recommends the players, for their knowledge of "tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical, historical-pastoral, scene-undividable, or poem-unlimited." On another occasion he ridicules the limitation of tragedy to an unfortunate catastrophe:

"And tragical, my noble lord, it is;
For Pyramus therein doth kill himself."

However, the division into comedies, tragedies, and historical dramas, according to the usual practice, may in some measure be adopted, if we do not lose sight of the transitions and affinities. The subjects of the comedies are generally taken from novels: they are romantic love tales; none are altogether confined to the sphere of common or domestic relations: all of them possess poetical ornament, some of them run into the wonderful or the pathetic. To these two of his most distinguished tragedies are immediately linked, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*; both true novels, and composed on the same principles. In many of the historical plays a considerable space is occupied by the comic characters and scenes; others are serious throughout, and leave behind the tragical impression. The essential circumstance by which they are distinguished is, that the plot bears a reference to a poetical and national interest. This is not so much the case in *Hamlet*, *Lear*, and *Macbeth*; and hence we do not include these tragedies among the historical pieces, though the first is founded on an old northern, the second on a national tradition; and the third comes even within the epoch of the Scottish history, after it ceased to be fabulous.

tensive, and I have therefore reserved it for a separate treatise. Besides at the present moment, while I am putting the last hand to my lectures, no collection of English books but my own is accessible to me. I should have completed it to answer this object, if the interruption of intercourse with England did not render it impossible to procure any other than the most common English books. On this point therefore I must request indulgence. In an appendix to this lecture I shall merely state a few observations in a cursory manner.

Among the comedies, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Comedy of Errors*, bear many traces of an early origin. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* paints the irresolution of love, and its infidelity towards friendship, in a pleasant, but in some degree superficial manner, we might almost say with the levity of mind which a passion suddenly entertained, and as suddenly given up, presupposes. The faithless lover is at last forgiven without much difficulty by his first mistress, on account of his ambiguous repentance; for the most serious part, the premeditated flight of the daughter of a Prince, the captivity of her father along with herself by a band of robbers, of which one of the two gentlemen, the faithless and banished friend, has been compulsively elected captain: for all this a peaceful solution is soon found. It is as if the course of the world was obliged to accommodate itself to a transient youthful caprice, called love. Julia, who accompanies her faithless lover in the disguise of a page, is, as it were, a light sketch of the tender female figures of a Viola and an Imogen, who, in the latter pieces of Shakspeare, leave their home in similar disguises on love adventures, and to whom a peculiar charm is communicated by the exhibition of the most virgin modesty in their hazardous and problematical situation.

The Comedy of Errors is the subject of the *Menechmæ* of Plautus, entirely recast and enriched with new developments: of all the works of Shakspeare this is the only example of imitation of, or borrowing from, the ancients. To the two twin brothers of the same name are added two slaves, also twins, impossible to be distinguished from each other, and of the same name. The improbability is by this means double: but when once we have lent ourselves to the first, which certainly borders on the incredible, we shall not probably be disposed to cavil about the second; and if the spectator is to be entertained by mere perplexities they cannot be too much varied. In such pieces we must always pre-suppose, to give an appearance of truth to the senses at least, that the parts by which the misunderstandings are occasioned are played with masks, and this the poet no doubt observed. I cannot acquiesce in the censure that the discovery is too long deferred: so long as novelty and interest are possessed by the perplexing incidents we need not be in dread of wearisomeness. And this is here really the case: matters are carried so far that one of the two brothers is first arrested for debt, then confined as a lunatic, and the other is forced to take refuge in a sanctuary to save his life. In a subject of this description it is impossible to steer clear of all sorts of low circumstances, abusive language, and blows; Shakspeare has however endeavoured to ennoble it

in every possible way. A couple of scenes, dedicated to jealousy and love, interrupt the course of perplexities which are merely occasioned by the external sense. A greater solemnity is given to the discovery, from the prince presiding, and from the re-union of the long separated parents of the twins who are still in life. The exposition, by which the spectator must be previously instructed while the characters in the play are still involved in ignorance, and which Plautus artlessly conveys in a prologue, is here masterly introduced in an affecting relation of the father. In short, this is perhaps the best of all written or possible *Menechmæ*; and if the piece is inferior in worth to other pieces of Shakspeare, it is merely because nothing more could be made of the materials.

The Taming of the Shrew has the air of an Italian comedy; and indeed the love intrigue, which constitutes the main part of it, is derived mediately or immediately from a piece of Ariosto. The characters and passions are lightly sketched; the intrigue is introduced without much preparation, and in its rapid progress impeded by no sort of difficulties; however, in the manner in which Petruchio, though previously cautioned respecting Catharine, still runs the risk of marrying her, and contrives to tame her, the character and peculiar humour of the English are visible. The colours are laid somewhat coarsely on, but the ground is good. That the obstinacy of a young and untamed girl, possessed of none of the attractions of her sex, and neither supported by bodily nor mental strength, must soon yield to the still rougher and more capricious but assumed self-will of man: such a lesson can only be taught on the stage with all the perspicuity of a proverb.

The prelude is still more remarkable than the play itself: the drunken tinker removed in his sleep to a palace, where he is deceived into the belief of being a nobleman. The invention, however, is not Shakspeare's. Holberg has handled the same subject in a masterly manner, and with inimitable truth; but he 'vas spun it out to five acts, for which the matter is hardly sufficient. He probably did not borrow from the English dramatist, but like him took the hint from a popular story. There are several comic motives of this description, which go back to a very remote age, without ever becoming antiquated.—Shakspeare proves himself here, as well as everywhere else, a great poet: the whole is merely a light sketch, but in elegance and nice propriety it will hardly ever be excelled. Neither has he overlooked the irony which the subject naturally suggested to him, that the great lord who is driven by idleness and *ennui* to deceive a poor drunkard, can make no better use of his situation than the latter, who every moment relapses into his vulgar habits. The last half of this

prelude, that in which the tinker in his new state again drinks himself out of his senses, and is transformed in his sleep into his former condition, from some accident or other is lost. It ought to have followed at the end of the larger piece. The occasional observations of the tinker, during the course of the representation of the comedy, might have been improvisatory; but it is hardly credible that Shakspeare should have trusted to the momentary suggestions of the players, which he did not hold in high estimation, the conclusion of a work, however short, which he had so carefully commenced. Moreover, the only circumstance which connects the prelude with the play is, that it belongs to the new life of the supposed nobleman to have plays acted in his castle by strolling actors. This invention of introducing spectators on the stage, who contribute to the entertainment, has been very wittily used by later English poets.

Love's Labour Lost is also numbered among the pieces of his youth. It is a humoursome display of frolic; a whole cornucopia of the most vivacious jokes is poured out into it. Youth is certainly perceivable in the lavish superfluity displayed in the execution: the uninterrupted succession of plays on words, and sallies of every description, hardly leave the spectator time to breathe; the sparks of wit fly about in such profusion, that they form complete fireworks, and the dialogue, for the most part, resembles the hurried manner in which the passing masks at a carnival attempt to banter each other. A young king of Navarre with three of his courtiers, has made a vow to pass three years in rigid retirement, employed in the study of wisdom; for that purpose he has banished all female society from court, and imposed a penalty on the intercourse with women. But scarcely has he announced this determination in a pompous discourse worthy of the most heroic achievements, when the daughter of the King of France appears at his court, in the name of her old and bed-ridden father, to demand back a province which he held in pledge. He is compelled to give her audience, falls immediately in love with her; and things do not succeed better with his companions, who on their parts renew their old acquaintance with the attendants of the princess. Each is already in his heart disposed to violate his vow, without knowing the wishes of his associates; they overhear one another, as they in turn confide their pains in a poem to the solitary forest; every one jeers and confounds the one who follows him. Biron, who from the beginning was the most satirical among them, at last steps forth, and rallies the king and the two others, till the discovery of a love-letter reduces even him to hang down his head. He extricates himself and his companions from their dilemma, by ridiculing the folly of the vow which

they have broken, and after a noble eulogy on women, by inviting them to swear allegiance to the colours of love. This scene is incomparably well planned, and the summit of the whole. The manner in which they afterwards prosecute their love suits in disguise, and in which they are tricked, and laughed at by the ladies, who also assume disguises, is spun out perhaps to too great a length. It may be thought too that the poet, when he suddenly announces the death of the King of France, and makes the Princess postpone the answer to the serious advances of the young Prince till the expiration of the period of her mourning, and impose besides a penance on him for his levity, falls out of the proper comic tone. But from the raillery which prevails throughout the whole piece, it was hardly possible to bring about a more satisfactory conclusion: the characters could only return to sobriety after their extravagance, by means of some foreign influence. The grotesque figures which between hands contribute to the entertainment, a pompous fantastical Spaniard, Don Armado, a couple of pedants, and a clown, are creatures of a whimsical imagination, well adapted as foils for the wit of a vivacious society.

All's Well that Ends Well, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Measure for Measure*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, bear in so far a resemblance to each other, that along with the main plot, which turns on important relations decisive of the happiness or misery of life, and which is calculated to make a powerful impression on the moral feeling, the poet has with artful dexterity contrived to introduce a number of admixtures of an exhilarating description. It is not as if the poet was unwilling to allow full scope to the serious impressions: he merely adds a due counterpoise to them in the entertainment which he supplies for the imagination and the understanding. He furnishes the story with all the separate features which give to it the appearance of a real, though extraordinary, event. But he never falls into the lachrymose tone of the sentimental drama, nor into the bitterness of those dramas which have a moral direction, and which are really nothing but moral invectives, and pasquinades, in the shape of dialogue. Compassion, anxiety, and discontent, become too oppressive when they are too long dwelt on, and when the whole of a work is exclusively limited to them. Shakspeare always transports us from the confinement of social institutions, or pretensions by which men intercept light and air from each other, into open space, before we ourselves even become conscious of our want.

All's Well that Ends Well is the old story of a young maiden whose love soared much beyond her station. She obtains her lover in marriage from the hand of the King as a reward for curing him, by means of a hereditary arcanum of her father, a

celebrated physician, from a hopeless and lingering disease. The young man treats her modesty and beauty with indignity; consummates the marriage only in appearance, and seeks security in the dangers of war, from a domestic happiness which wounds his pride. By faithful perseverance and innocence of behaviour, she fulfils the apparently impossible conditions on which the Count promised to acknowledge her as his wife. Love appears here in humble guise: it strives on the female side to overcome the prejudices of birth without being strengthened by the support of mutual inclination. But as soon as Helena is connected with the Count by a sacred bond, though by him considered as an oppressive chain; her error becomes her virtue. She affects us by her patient suffering: the moment in which she appears to most advantage is when she accuses herself as the persecutor of her inflexible husband, and, under the pretext of a pilgrimage to atone for her error, privately leaves the house of her mother-in-law. Johnson expresses a cordial aversion to Count Bertram, and regrets that he should be allowed to come off at last with no other punishment than a temporary shame, nay, even be rewarded with the unmerited possession of a virtuous wife. But did Shakspeare ever attempt to mitigate the impression of his unfeeling pride and giddy dissipation? He intended merely to give us a military portrait. And does not the poet paint the true way of the world, according to which the injustice of men towards women is not considered in a very serious light, if they can only maintain what is called the honour of their family? Bertram's sole justification is, that the King, in a matter of such delicacy and private right as the choice of a wife, thought proper to constrain him by the exercise of arbitrary power. Besides, this story, as well as that of Griseldi and many of a similar description, is intended to prove that female truth and resignation will at last overcome the violence of men; other novels and *fabliaux* again are true satires on the inconstancy and cunning of women. In this piece age is exhibited to singular advantage: the plain honesty of the King, the good-natured impetuosity of old Lafeu, the maternal indulgence of the Countess to Helena's love of her son, seem all as it were to vie with each other in endeavours to conquer the arrogance of the young Count. The style of the whole is more conspicuous for sententiousness than imagery: the glowing colours of fancy could not with propriety have been introduced into such a subject. In the passages where the humiliating abandonment of the poor Helena becomes most painful, the cowardly Parolles steps in to the relief of the spectator. The stratagems by which his pretended valour and his impudent defamation are unmasked are among the most comic scenes which ever were invented: they

contain matter enough for an excellent comedy, if Shakspeare were not always rich even to profusion. Falstaff has thrown Parolles into the shade, otherwise he would have been more celebrated among the comic characters of the poet.

The main plot in *Much Ado about Nothing* is the same story of *Ariodante* and *Ginevra* in Ariosto; the secondary circumstances and development are no doubt very different. The manner in which the innocent Hero when before the altar at the moment of her marriage, in the presence of her family and many witnesses, is brought to shame by accusations of the most contumelious nature, yet clothed with a great appearance of truth, is a grand piece of theatrical effect in the genuine and justifiable sense. The impression would have been too tragical if Shakspeare had not purposely softened it with the view of preparing a fortunate catastrophe. The discovery of the plot against Hero has been already partly made, though not by the persons interested; and the poet has contrived to convert the arrest and examination of the guilty individuals into scenes of the most entertaining description, by means of the blundering simplicity of a couple of constables and watchmen. There is a second piece of theatrical effect not inferior to the first, where Claudio, misled by his error, in the intention of giving his hand to a relation of his bride, whom he supposes to be dead, on unveiling her discovers Hero herself. The uncommon success of this play in Shakspeare's own time, and even since in England, is more particularly to be attributed however to the parts of Benedict and Beatrice, two humorous beings, who incessantly attack each other with all the resources of raillery. Declared rebels to love, they are both entangled in its net by a plot of their friends to make them believe that they are the object of the secret passion of each other. Some one, without any great share of penetration, objected to the making twice use of the same artifice in entrapping them; the drollery, however, lies in the very symmetry of the deception. Their friends attribute the whole effect to themselves; but the exclusive direction of their raillery against each other is in itself a proof of a glowing inclination. Their witty vivacity does not even abandon them during the declaration of love; and their behaviour only assumes a serious appearance for the purpose of defending the slandered Hero. This is exceedingly well imagined; the lovers of jesting must fix a point beyond which they are not to indulge in their propensity, if they would not be mistaken for buffoons by trade.

In *Measure for Measure* Shakspeare was compelled, by the nature of the subject, to make his poetry more familiar with criminal justice than is usual with him. All kinds of proceedings

connected with the subject, all sorts of active or passive persons, pass in review before us: the hypocritical Lord Deputy, the compassionate Provost, and the hard-hearted Hangman; a young man of quality who is to suffer for the seduction of his mistress before marriage, loose wretches brought in by the police, nay, even a hardened criminal whom the preparations for his execution cannot awake out of his callousness. But yet, notwithstanding this convincing truth, how tenderly and mildly the whole is treated! The piece takes improperly its name from the punishment: the sense of the whole is properly the triumph of mercy over strict justice; no man being himself so secure from errors as to be entitled to deal it out among his equals. The most beautiful ornament of the composition is the character of Isabella, who, in the intention of taking the veil, allows herself to be prevailed on by pious love again to tread the perplexing ways of the world, while the heavenly purity of her mind is not even stained with one unholy thought by the general corruption: in the humble robes of the novice of a nunnery she is a true angel of light. When the cold and hitherto unsullied Angelo, whom the Duke has commissioned to restrain the excesses of dissolute immorality by a rigid administration of the laws during his pretended absence, is even himself tempted by the virgin charms of Isabella as she supplicates for her brother Claudio, doomed to death for a youthful error; when he first insinuates in timid and obscure language, but at last impudently declares his readiness to grant the life of Claudio for the sacrifice of her honour; when Isabella repulses him with a noble contempt; when she relates what has happened to her brother, and the latter at first applauds her, but at length, overpowered by the dread of death, wishes to persuade her to consent to her dishonour:—in these masterly scenes Shakspeare has sounded the depth of the human heart. The interest here reposes altogether on the action, curiosity constitutes no part of our delight; for the Duke, in the disguise of a Monk, is always present to watch over his dangerous representatives, and to avert every evil which could possibly be apprehended: we look here with confidence to the solemn decision. The Duke acts the part of the Monk naturally even to deception; he unites in his person the wisdom of the priest and the prince. His wisdom is merely too fond of round-about ways; his vanity is flattered with acting invisibly like an earthly providence; he is more entertained with overhearing his subjects than governing them in the customary manner. As he at last extends pardon to all the guilty, we do not see how his original purpose of restoring the strictness of the laws by committing the execution of them to other hands has been in anywise accomplished. The poet might have had this

irony in view, that of the numberless slanders of the Duke, told him by the petulant Lucio without knowing the person to whom he spoke, what regarded his singularities and whims was not wholly without foundation. It is deserving of remark that Shakspeare amidst the rancour of religious parties, takes a delight in painting the condition of a monk, and always represents influence as beneficial. We find in him none of the black and knavish monks, which an enthusiasm for the protestant religion, rather than poetical inspiration, has suggested to some of our modern poets. Shakspeare merely gives his monks an inclination to busy themselves in the affairs of others, after renouncing the world for themselves; with respect however to pious frauds he does not represent them as very conscientious. Such are the parts acted by the monk in *Romeo and Juliet*, and another in *Much Ado about Nothing*, and even by the Duke, whom, contrary to the well known proverb, the cowl seems really to make a monk.

The *Merchant of Venice* is one of Shakspeare's most perfect works: popular to an extraordinary degree, and calculated to produce the most powerful effect on the stage, and at the same time a wonder of ingenuity and art for the reflecting critic. Shylock, the Jew, is one of the inconceivable master pieces of characterization of which Shakspeare alone furnishes us with examples. It is easy for the poet and the player to exhibit a caricature of national sentiments, modes of speaking, and gestures. Shylock however is everything but a common Jew: he possesses a very determinate and original individuality, and yet we perceive a light touch of Judaism in everything which he says or does. We imagine we hear a sprinkling of the Jewish pronunciation in the mere written words, as we sometimes still find it in the higher classes, notwithstanding their social refinement. In tranquil situations, what is foreign to the European blood and Christian sentiments is less perceivable, but in passion the national stamp appears more strongly marked. All these inimitable niceties the finished art of a great actor can alone properly express. Shylock is a man of information, even a thinker in his own way; he has only not discovered the region where human feelings dwell: his morality is founded on the disbelief in goodness and magnanimity. The desire of revenging the oppressions and humiliations suffered by his nation is, after avarice, his principal spring of action. His hate is naturally directed chiefly against those Christians who possess truly Christian sentiments: the example of disinterested love of our neighbour seems to him the most unrelenting persecution of the Jews. The letter of the law is his idol; he refuses to lend an ear to the voice of mercy, which speaks to him from the mouth of Portia with heavenly eloquence:

he insists on severe and inflexible justice, and it at last recoils on his own head. Here he becomes a symbol of the general history of his unfortunate nation. The melancholy and self-neglectful magnanimity of Antonio is affectingly sublime. Like a royal merchant, he is surrounded with a whole train of noble friends. The contrast which this forms to the selfish cruelty of the usurer Shylock, was necessary to redeem the honour of human nature. The danger which hangs over Antonio till towards the conclusion of the fourth act, and which the imagination is almost afraid to approach, would fill us with too painful an anxiety, if the poet did not also provide for our entertainment and dissipation. This is particularly effected by the scenes at the country-seat of Portia, which transport the spectator into quite another sphere. And yet they are closely connected, by the concatenation of causes and effects, with the main business: the preparations of Bassanio for his courtship are the cause of Antonio's subscribing the dangerous bond; and Portia again, by means of the advice of her uncle, a celebrated counsel, effects the safety of the friend of her lover. But the relations of the dramatic composition are still here admirably observed in another manner. The trial between Shylock and Antonio, though it proceeds like a real event, still remains an unheard of and particular case. Shakspeare has consequently associated with it a love intrigue not less extraordinary: the one becomes natural and probable by means of the other. A rich, beautiful, and clever heiress, who can only be won by the solving of a riddle; the locked caskets; the foreign princes, who come to try the adventure: with all this wonderful splendour the imagination is powerfully excited. The two scenes in which the Prince of Morocco, in the language of Eastern hyperbole, and the self-conceited Prince of Arragon, make their choice among the caskets, merely raise our curiosity, and give employment to our wits; in the third, where the two lovers stand trembling before the inevitable choice, which in one moment must unite or separate them for ever; Shakspeare has lavished all the seductions of feeling, all the magic of poetry. We share in the rapture of Portia and Bassanio at the fortunate choice: we easily conceive why they are fond of each other, for they are both most deserving of love. The judgment scene, with which the fourth act is occupied, is alone a perfect drama, concentrating in itself the interest of the whole. The knot is now untied, and according to the common ideas of theatrical satisfaction, the curtain might drop. But the poet was unwilling to dismiss his audience with the gloomy impressions which the delivery of Antonio, accomplished with so much difficulty, contrary to all expectation, and the punishment of Shylock, were calculated to

leave behind: he has therefore added the fifth act by way of a musical afterpiece in the piece itself. The episode of Jessica, the fugitive daughter of the Jew, in whom Shakspeare has contrived to throw a disguise of sweetness over the national features, and the artifice by which Portia and her companion are enabled to rally their newly married husbands, supply him with the materials. The scene opens with the playful prattling of two lovers in a summer evening; it is followed by soft music and a rapturous eulogy on this powerful disposer of the human mind and the world; the principal characters then make their appearance, and after an assumed dissension, which is elegantly carried on, the whole ends with the most exhilarating mirth.

As You Like It is a piece of an entire different description. It would be difficult to bring the contents within the compass of an ordinary relation: nothing takes place, or rather what does take place is not so essential as what is said; even what may be called the denouement is brought about in a pretty arbitrary manner. Whoever perceives nothing but what is capable of demonstration will hardly be disposed to allow that it has any plan at all. Banishment and flight have assembled together, in the forest of Arden, a singular society: a Duke dethroned by his brother, and, with his faithful companions in misfortune, living in the wilds on the produce of the chase; two distinguished princesses, who love each other with a sisterly affection, a witty court fool; lastly, the native inhabitants of the forest, ideal and natural shepherds and shepherdesses. These lightly sketched figures pass along in the most diversified succession; we see always the shady dark-green landscape in the back ground, and breathe in imagination the fresh air of the forest. The hours are here measured by no clocks, no regulated recurrences of duty or toil: they flow on unnumbered in voluntary occupation or fanciful idleness, to which every one addicts himself according to his humour or disposition, and this unlimited freedom compensates all of them for the lost conveniences of life. One throws himself down solitarily under a tree, and indulges in melancholy reflections on the changes of fortune, the falsehood of the world, and the self-created torments of social life; others make the woods resound with social and festive songs, to the accompaniment of their horns. Selfishness, envy, and ambition, have been left in the city behind them; of all the human passions love alone has found an entrance into this wilderness, where it dictates the same language to the simple shepherd and the chivalrous youth, who hangs his love-ditty to a tree. A prudish shepherdess falls instantaneously in love with Rosalind, disguised in men's apparel; the latter sharply reproaches her with her severity to her poor

lover, and the pain of refusal, which she at length feels from her own experience, disposes her to compassion and requital. The fool carries his philosophical contempt of external show, and his raillery of the illusion of love, so far, that he purposely seeks out the ugliest and simplest country wench for a mistress. Throughout the whole picture, it seems to have been the intention of the poet to show, that nothing is wanted to call forth the poetry which has its dwelling in nature and the human mind but to throw off all artificial constraint, and restore both to their native liberty. In the progress of the piece itself, the visionary carelessness of such an existence is expressed: it has even been alluded to by Shakspeare in the title. Whoever affects to be displeased, that in this romantic forest the ceremonial of dramatic art is not duly observed, ought in justice to be delivered over to the wise fool, for the purpose of being kindly conducted out of it to some prosaical region.

The Twelfth Night, or What You Will, unites the entertainment of an intrigue, contrived with great ingenuity, to the richest fund of comic characters and situations, and the beauteous colours of an ethereal poetry. In most of his plays, Shakspeare treats love more as an affair of the imagination than the heart; but here we are particularly reminded by him that, in his language, the same word, *fancy*, signified both fancy and love. The love of the music-enraptured Duke to Olivia is not merely a fancy, but an imagination; Viola appears at first to fall arbitrarily in love with the Duke, whom she serves as a page, although she afterwards touches the tenderest strings of feeling; the proud Olivia is entangled by the modest and insinuating messenger of the Duke, in whom she is far from suspecting a disguised rival, and at last, by a second deception, takes the brother for the sister. To these, which I might call ideal follies, a contrast is formed by the naked absurdities to which the entertaining tricks of the ludicrous persons of the piece give rise, in like manner under the pretence of love: the awkward courtship of a silly and profligate Knight to Olivia, and her declaration to Viola; the imagination of the pedantical steward Malvolio, that his mistress is secretly in love with him, which carries him so far that he is at last shut up as a lunatic, and visited by the clown in the dress of a priest. These scenes are as admirably conceived and significant, as they are laughable. If this was really the last work of Shakspeare, as is affirmed, he must have enjoyed to the last the same youthfulness of mind, and have carried with him to the grave the whole fulness of his talents.

The Merry Wives of Windsor, though properly a comedy in the usual acceptation of the word, we shall pass over at present,

till we come to speak of *Henry IV.*, that we may give our opinion of the character of Falstaff in connexion.

The Midsummer Night's Dream, and *The Tempest*, may be in so far compared together, that in both the influence of a wonderful world of spirits is interwoven with the turmoil of human passions and with the farcical adventures of folly. *The Midsummer Night's Dream* is certainly an earlier production; but *The Tempest*, according to all appearance, was written in Shakespeare's later days: hence most critics, on the supposition that the poet must have continued to improve with increasing maturity of mind, have given the last piece a great preference over the former. I cannot, however, altogether agree with them in this: the internal worth of these two works, in my opinion, are pretty equally balanced, and a predilection for the one or the other can only be governed by personal taste. The superiority of *The Tempest*, in regard to profound and original characterization, is obvious; as a whole we must always admire the masterly skill which he has here displayed in the economy of his means, and the dexterity with which he has disguised his preparations, the scaffolding for the wonderful aerial structure. In *The Midsummer Night's Dream* again there flows a luxuriant vein of the boldest and most fantastical invention; the most extraordinary combination of the most dissimilar ingredients seems to have arisen without effort by some ingenious and lucky accident, and the colours are of such clear transparency that we think the whole of the variegated fabric may be blown away with a breath. The fairy world here described resembles those elegant pieces of Arabesque, where little Genii, with butterfly wings, rise half embodied above the flower cups. Twilight, moonshine, dew, and spring-perfumes, are the element of these tender spirits; they assist nature in embroidering her carpet with green leaves, many-coloured flowers, and dazzling insects; in the human world they merely sport in a childish and wayward manner with their beneficent or noxious influences. Their most violent rage dissolves in good-natured raillery; their passions, stripped of all earthly matter, are merely an ideal dream. To correspond with this, the loves of mortals are painted as a poetical enchantment, which, by a contrary enchantment, may be immediately suspended, and then renewed again. The different parts of the plot; the wedding of Theseus, the disagreement of Oberon and Titania, the flight of the two pair of lovers, and the theatrical operations of the mechanics, are so lightly and happily interwoven, that they seem necessary to each other for the formation of a whole. Oberon is desirous of relieving the lovers from their perplexities, and greatly adds to them through the misapprehen-

sion of his servant, till he at last comes to the aid of their fruitless amorous pain, their inconstancy and jealousy, and restores fidelity to its old rights. The extremes of fanciful and vulgar are united when the enchanted Titania awakes and falls in love with a coarse mechanic with an ass's head, who represents, or rather disfigures, the part of a tragical lover. The droll wonder of the transmutation of Bottom is merely the translation of a metaphor in its literal sense; but in his behaviour during the tender homage of the Fairy Queen, we have a most amusing proof how much the consciousness of such a head-dress heightens the effect of his usual folly. Theseus and Hippolyta are, as it were, a splendid frame for the picture; they take no part in the action, but appear with a stately pomp. The discourse of the hero and his Amazon, as they course through the forest with their noisy hunting train, works upon the imagination like the fresh breath of morning, before which the shades of night disappear. Pyramus and Thisbe is not unmeaningly chosen as the grotesque play within the play: it is exactly like the pathetic part of the piece, a secret meeting of two lovers in the forest, and their dispersion by an unfortunate accident, and closes the whole with the most amusing parody.

The Tempest has little action and progressive movement: the union of Ferdinand and Miranda is fixed at their first meeting, and Prospero merely throws apparent obstacles in their way; the shipwrecked band go leisurely about the island; the attempts of Sebastian and Antonio on the life of the King of Naples, and of Caliban and the drunken sailors against Prospero, are nothing but a feint, as we foresee that they will be completely frustrated by the magical skill of the latter; nothing remains therefore but the punishment of the guilty by dreadful sights which harrow up their consciences, the discovery and final reconciliation. Yet this want is so admirably concealed by the most varied display of the fascinations of poetry, and the exhilaration of mirth, the details of the execution are so very attractive, that it requires no small degree of attention to perceive that the denouement is, in some degree, already contained in the exposition. The history of the love of Ferdinand and Miranda, developed in a few short scenes, is enchantingly beautiful: an affecting union of chivalrous magnanimity on the one part, and on the other of the virgin openness of a heart which, brought up far from the world on an uninhabited island, has never learned to disguise its innocent movements. The wisdom of the princely hermit Prospero has a magical and mysterious air; the impression of the black falsehood of the two usurpers is mitigated by the honest gossiping of the old and faithful Gonzalo; Trinculo and Stephano, two good-

for-nothing drunkards, find a worthy associate in Caliban; and Ariel hovers sweetly over the whole as the personified genius of the wonderful fable.

Caliban has become a by-word as the strange creation of a poetical imagination. A mixture of the gnome and the savage, half dæmon, half brute, in his behaviour we perceive at once the traces of his native disposition, and the influence of Prospero's education. The latter could only unfold his understanding, without, in the slightest degree, taming his rooted malignity: it is as if the use of reason and human speech should be communicated to a stupid ape. Caliban is malicious, cowardly, false, and base in his inclinations; and yet he is essentially different from the vulgar knaves of a civilized world, as they are occasionally portrayed by Shakspeare. He is rude, but not vulgar; he never falls into the prosaic and low familiarity of his drunken associates, for he is a poetical being in his way; he always too speaks in verse. He has picked up everything dissonant and thorny in language, out of which he has composed his vocabulary, and of the whole variety of nature the hateful, repulsive, and pettily deformed, have alone been impressed on his imagination. The magical world of spirits, which the staff of Prospero has assembled on the island, casts merely a faint reflection into his mind, as a ray of light which falls into a dark cave, incapable of communicating to it either heat or illumination, merely serves to put in motion the poisonous vapours. The whole delineation of this monster is inconceivably consistent and profound, and, notwithstanding its hatefulness, by no means hurtful to our feelings, as the honour of human nature is left untouched.

In the zephyr-like Ariel the image of air is not to be mistaken, his name even bears an allusion to it; as, on the other hand, Caliban signifies the heavy element of the earth. Yet they are neither of them allegorical personifications, but beings individually determined. In general we find, in *The Midsummer Night's Dream*, in *The Tempest*, in the magical part of *Macbeth*, and wherever Shakspeare avails himself of the popular belief in the invisible presence of spirits, and the possibility of coming in contact with them, a profound view of the inward life of nature and her mysterious springs, which, it is true, ought never to be altogether unknown to the genuine poet, as poetry is altogether incompatible with mechanical physics, but which few have possessed in an equal degree with Dante and himself.

The Winter's Tale is as appropriately named as *The Midsummer Night's Dream*. It is one of those tales which are peculiarly calculated to beguile the dreary leisure of a long winter evening, which are even attractive and intelligible to child-

hood, and which, animated by fervent truth in the delineation of character and passion, invested with the decoration of a poetry lowering itself, as it were, to the simplicity of the subject, transport even manhood back to the golden age of imagination. The calculation of probabilities has nothing to do with such wonderful and fleeting adventures, ending at last in general joy; and accordingly Shakspeare has here taken the greatest liberties with anachronisms and geographical errors: he opens a free navigation between Sicily and Bohemia, makes Giulio Romano the contemporary of the Delphic oracle, not to mention other incongruities. The piece divides itself in some degree into two plays. Leontes becomes suddenly jealous of his royal bosom friend Polyxenes, who has visited him, makes an attempt on his life, and Polyxenes saves himself by a clandestine flight; Hermione, suspected of infidelity, is thrown into prison, and the daughter which she brings into the world is exposed on a remote coast; the accused Queen declared innocent by the oracle, on learning that her infant son has pined to death on her account, falls down senseless, and is mourned as dead by her husband who becomes sensible when too late of his error: this makes the subject of the three first acts. The last two are separated from these by a chasm of sixteen years: but the above tragical catastrophe was only apparent, and this serves to connect the two parts. The Princess, who has been exposed on the coast of the kingdom of Polyxenes, grows up among low shepherds; but her tender beauty, her noble manners, and elevation of sentiment, bespeak her descent; the Crown Prince Florizel, in the course of his hawking falls in with her, becomes enamoured, and courts her in the disguise of a shepherd; at a rural entertainment Polyxenes discovers their intention, and breaks out into a violent rage; the two lovers seek refuge from his persecution at the court of Leontes in Sicily, when the discovery and general reconciliation take place. When Leontes at last beholds, as he imagines, the statue of his lost spouse, she descends to him from her niche: it is she herself, the still living Hermione, who has kept herself so long concealed; and the piece ends with universal rejoicing. The jealousy of Leontes is not, like that of Othello, developed with all the causes, symptoms, and gradations; it is brought forward at once, and is portrayed as a distempered frenzy. It is a passion with whose effects the spectator is more concerned than with its origin, and which does not produce the catastrophe, but merely ties the knot of the piece. In fact, the poet might perhaps have wished to indicate slightly that Hermione, though virtuous, was too active in her efforts to please Polyxenes; and it appears as if this germ of an inclination first attained its proper maturity in their children.

Nothing can be more fresh and youthful, nothing at once so ideally pastoral and princely as the love of Florizel and Perdita; of the Prince, whom love converts into a voluntary shepherd; and the Princess, who betrays her exalted origin without knowing it, and in whose hands the nosegays become crowns. Shakspeare has never hesitated to place ideal poetry close by the side of the most vulgar prose; and this is also generally the case in the world of reality. Perdita's foster-father and his son are both made simple boors, that we may the more distinctly see whatever ennobles her belongs to herself. The merry pedlar and pick-pocket Autolycus, so inimitably portrayed, is necessary to complete the rustic feast, which Perdita on her part seems to render fit for an assemblage of deities in disguise.

Cymbeline is also one of Shakspeare's most wonderful compositions. He has here connected a novel of Boccaccio with traditional tales of the ancient Britons reaching back to the times of the first Roman Emperors, and he has contrived, by the most gentle transitions, to blend together into one harmonious whole the social manners of the latest times with heroic deeds, and even with appearances of the gods. In the character of Imogen not a feature of female excellence is forgotten: her chaste tenderness, her softness, and her virgin pride, her boundless resignation, and her magnanimity towards her mistaken husband by whom she is unjustly persecuted, her adventures in disguise, her apparent death, and her recovery, form altogether a picture equally tender and affecting. The two Princes Guiderius and Arviragus, both educated in the wilds, form a noble contrast to Miranda and Perdita. Shakspeare is fond of showing the superiority of the innate over the acquired. Over the art which enriches nature he somewhere says, there is always a higher art created by nature herself.* As Miranda's unconscious and unstudied sweetness is

* The passage in Shakspeare here quoted, taken with the context, will not bear the construction of the author. The whole runs thus:—

Yet nature is made better by no mean,
But nature makes that mean: so, o'er that art
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock;
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race: this is an art
Which does mend nature, change it rather; but
The art itself is nature.

Winter's Tale, Act iv. Scene 3.

Shakspeare does not here mean to institute a comparison between the relative excellency of that which is innate and that which we owe to instruction; but merely says, that the instruction or art is itself a part of nature. The speech is

more pleasing than those charms which endeavour to captivate us by the brilliant decoration of the most refined cultivation, so in these two young men, to whom the chase has given vigour and hardihood, but who are unacquainted with their high destination, and have been always kept far from human society, we are equally enchanted by a *naïve* heroism which leads them to anticipate and to dream of deeds of valour, till an occasion is offered which they are irresistibly impelled to embrace. When Imogen comes in disguise to their cave; when Guiderius and Arviragus form an impassioned friendship with all the innocence of childhood for the tender boy, in whom they neither suspect a female nor their own sister; when on returning from the chase they find her dead, "sing her to the ground," and cover the grave with flowers:—these scenes may give new life for poetry to the most deadened imagination. If a tragical event is only apparent, whether the spectators are already aware of this or ought merely to suspect it, Shakspeare always knows how to mitigate the impression without weakening it: he makes the mourning musical, that it may gain in solemnity what it loses in seriousness. With respect to the other parts, the wise and vigorous Belarius, who after living long as a hermit again becomes a hero, is a venerable figure; the dexterous dissimulation and quick presence of mind of the Italian Iachimo is quite suitable to the bold treachery which he plays; Cymbeline, the father of Imogen, and even her husband Posthumus, during the first half of the piece, are somewhat sacrificed, but this could not be otherwise; the false and wicked Queen is merely an instrument of the plot; she and her stupid son Cloton (the only comic part in the piece) whose rude arrogance is portrayed with much humour, are got rid of by merited punishment before the conclusion. For the heroical part of the fable, the war between the Romans and Britons which brings on the conclusion, the poet in the extent of his plan had so little room to spare, that he merely endeavours to represent it as a mute procession. But to the last scene, where all the numerous threads of the knot are untied, he has again given its full development, that he might collect the impressions of the whole into one focus. This example and many others are a sufficient refutation of Johnson's assertion that Shakspeare usually hurries over the conclusion of his pieces. He rather introduces a great deal which, for the understanding of the *denoue-*

addressed by Polyxenes to Perdita, to persuade her that the changes effected in the appearance of flowers by the art of the gardener are not to be accounted unnatural; and the expression of *making conceive a bark of baser kind by bud of nobler race* (i. e. engrafting), would rather lead to the inference, that the mind derived its chief value from the influence of culture.—TRANS.

ment, might in a strict sense be spared, from a desire to satisfy the feeling; our modern spectators are much more impatient than those of his day to see the curtain drop when there is nothing more to be determined.

Romeo and Juliet, and *Othello*, differ from the most of the pieces which we have hitherto gone through neither in the ingredients of the composition, nor in the manner of treating them: it is merely the direction of the whole which gives them the stamp of tragedies. *Romeo and Juliet* is a picture of love and its pitiable fate, in a world whose atmosphere is too rough for this tenderest blossom of human life. Two beings created for each other feel mutual love at a first glance; every consideration disappears before the irresistible influence of living in one another; they join themselves secretly under circumstances hostile in the highest degree to their union, relying merely on the protection of an invisible power. By unfriendly events following blow upon blow their heroic constancy is exposed to all manner of trials, till, forcibly separated from each other, by a voluntary death they are united in the grave to meet again in another world. All this is to be found in the beautiful story which Shakspeare has not invented, and which, however simply told, will always excite a tender sympathy: but it was reserved for Shakspeare to unite purity of heart and the glow of the imagination, sweetness and dignity of manners and passionate violence, in one ideal picture. By the manner in which he has handled it, it has become a glorious song of praise on that inexpressible feeling which ennobles the soul and gives to it its highest sublimity, and which elevates even the senses themselves into soul, and at the same time is a melancholy elegy on its frailty from its own nature and external circumstances; at once the deification and the burial of love. It appears here like a heavenly spark that, descending to the earth, is converted into a flash of lightning, by which mortal creatures are almost in the same moment set on fire and consumed. Whatever is most intoxicating in the odour of a southern spring, languishing in the song of the nightingale, or voluptuous on the first opening of the rose, is breathed into this poem. But even more rapidly than the earliest blossoms of youth and beauty decay, it hurries on from the first timidly-bold declaration of love and modest return to the most unlimited passion, to an irrevocable union; then, amidst alternating storms of rapture and despair, to the death of the two lovers, who still appear enviable as their love survives them, and as by their death they have obtained a triumph over every separating power. The sweetest and the bitterest, love and hatred, festivity and dark forebodings, tender embraces and

sepulchres, the fulness of life and self-annihilation, are all here brought close to each other; and all these contrasts are so blended in the harmonious and wonderful work into a unity of impression, that the echo which the whole leaves behind in the mind resembles a single but endless sigh.

The excellent dramatic arrangement, the signification of each character in its place, the judicious selection of all the circumstances even the most minute, I have unfolded in detail in a treatise already cited, and I will not therefore here repeat myself. I shall only request attention to one trait which I there omitted, and which may serve for an example of the distance from which Shakspeare begins his preparations. The most striking and perhaps incredible circumstance in the whole story is the liquor given by the Monk to Juliet, by which she for a number of hours not merely sleeps but fully resembles a corpse, without thereby receiving any injury. How does the poet dispose us to believe that Father Lorenzo possesses such a secret?—He exhibits him to us at his first entrance in a garden, where he is collecting herbs and descanting on their wonderful virtues. The discourse of the pious old man is full of deep meaning: he sees everywhere in nature symbols of the moral world; the same wisdom with which he looks through her has made him master of the human heart. In this manner a circumstance of an obstinate, or at least an ungrateful appearance, has become the source of a great beauty.

If *Romeo and Juliet* shines with the colours of the dawn of morning, but a dawn whose purple clouds already announce the thunder of a sultry day, *Othello* is, on the other hand, a strongly shaded picture: we might call it a tragical *Rembrandt*.—What a fortunate mistake that the Moor, under which name a baptized Saracen of the Northern coast of Africa was unquestionably meant in the novel, has been made by Shakspeare in every respect a negro! We recognize in *Othello* the wild nature of that glowing zone which generates the most raging beasts of prey and the most deadly poisons, tamed only in appearance by the desire of fame, by foreign laws of honour, and by nobler and milder manners. His jealousy is not the jealousy of the heart, which is compatible with the tenderest feeling and adoration of the beloved object; it is of that sensual kind which, in burning climes, has given birth to the disgraceful confinement of women and many other unnatural usages. A drop of this poison flows in his veins, and sets his whole blood in the most disorderly fermentation. The Moor seems noble, frank, confiding, grateful for the love shown him; and he is all this, and moreover, a hero, who spurns at danger, a worthy leader of an army, a faithful servant of the state; but the mere physical force of passion puts to flight in one moment

all his acquired and accustomed virtues, and gives the upper hand to the savage in him over the moral man. This tyranny of the blood over the will betrays itself even in the expression of his desire of revenge against Cassio. In his repentance when he views the evidence of the deed, a genuine tenderness for his murdered wife and the painful feelings of his annihilated honour, at last burst forth; and he every now and then assails himself with the rage which a despot betrays in punishing a runaway slave. He suffers as a double man; at once in the higher and lower sphere into which his being was divided.—While the Moor bears not only the nightly colour of suspicion and deceit on his visage, Iago is black within. He pursues Othello like his evil spirit, and with his light, and therefore the more dangerous, insinuations: he leaves him no rest; it is as if by means of an unfortunate affinity, founded however in nature, this influence was by necessity more powerful over him than the voice of his good angel Desdemona. A more artful villain than this Iago was never portrayed: he spreads his nets with a skill which nothing can escape. The repugnance inspired by his aims becomes insupportable from the attention of the spectators being directed to his means: they furnish infinite employment to the understanding. Cool, discontented, and morose, arrogant where he dare be so, but humble and insinuating when it suits his purposes, he is a complete master in the art of dissimulation; accessible only to selfish emotions, he is thoroughly skilled in rousing the passions of others, and of availing himself of every opening which they give him: he is as excellent an observer of men as any one can be who is unacquainted with higher motives of action from his own experience; there is always some truth in his malicious observations on them. He does not merely pretend an obdurate incredulity as to the virtue of women, he actually entertains it; and this, too, falls in with his whole way of thinking, and makes him the more fit for the execution of his purpose. As in everything he sees merely the hateful side, he dissolves in the rudest manner the charm which the imagination casts over the relation between the two sexes: he does so for the purpose of throwing into commotion the senses of Othello, whom his heart might have easily convinced of Desdemona's innocence. This must serve as an excuse for the numerous expressions in the speeches of Iago from which modesty shrinks back. If Shakspeare had written in our days he would not perhaps have dared to hazard them; but this must certainly have very much injured the truth of his picture. Desdemona is an offering without blemish. She is not, it is true, a high ideal representation of sweetness and enthusiastic passion like Juliet; full of simpli-

city, softness, and humility, and so innocent, that she can hardly form to herself an idea of the possibility of infidelity, she seems calculated to make the most yielding and tender wife. The female propensity wholly to follow a foreign destiny has led her into the only error she ever committed, that of marrying without the consent of her father. Her choice seems wrong; and yet she has been gained over to Othello by that which induces the female to honour in man her protector and guide,—admiration of his determined heroism, and compassion for the sufferings which he had undergone. With great art it is so contrived, that from the very circumstance that the possibility of a suspicion of herself never once enters her mind, she is the less reserved in her solicitation for Cassio, by which she more and more heightens the jealousy of the Moor. To give still greater effect to the angelic purity of Desdemona, Shakspeare has in Emilia associated with her a companion of doubtful virtue. From the sinful levity of this woman it is also conceivable, that she should not confess the abstraction of the handkerchief when Othello violently demands it back: this would otherwise be the circumstance in the whole piece the most difficult to justify. Cassio is portrayed exactly as he ought to be to excite suspicion without actual guilt,—amiable and nobly disposed, but easily seduced. The public events of the first two acts show us Othello in his most glorious aspect, as the support of Venice and the terror of the Turks: they serve to withdraw the story from the mere domestic circle, which is done in *Romeo and Juliet* by the dissensions between the houses of Montague and Capulet. No eloquence is capable of painting the overwhelming force of the catastrophe in *Othello*, the pressure of feelings which measure out in a moment the abysses of eternity.

Hamlet is single in its kind: a tragedy of thought inspired by continual and never satisfied meditation on human destiny and the dark perplexity of the events of this world, and calculated to call forth the very same meditation in the minds of the spectators. This enigmatical work resembles those irrational equations in which a fraction of unknown magnitude always remains, that will in no manner admit of solution. Much has been said, much written on this piece, and yet no thinking head who anew expresses himself on it will, in his view of the connection and the signification of all the parts, entirely coincide with his predecessors. It must astonish us the most, that with such hidden purposes, with a foundation laid in such unfathomable depth, the whole should, at a first view, exhibit an extremely proper appearance. The dread appearance of the Ghost takes possession of the mind and the imagination at the commencement; then the

play within the play, in which we see reflected as in a glass the crime, the fruitlessly attempted punishment of which constitutes the subject of the piece; the alarm with which it fills the King; Hamlet's pretended and Ophelia's real madness; her death and burial; the meeting of Hamlet and Laertes at her grave; their combat, and the grand determination; lastly, the appearance of the young hero Fortinbras who with warlike pomp, pays the last honours to an extinguished Royal Family; the comic characteristic scenes with Polonius, the Courtiers, and the Grave-Diggers interspersed, which have all of them their signification,—all this fills the stage with the most animated and varied movements. The only circumstance from which this piece might be found less theatrical than other tragedies of Shakspeare is, that in the last scene the main action either stands still or appears to retrograde. This however was inevitable, and lies in the nature of the thing. The whole is intended to show that a consideration which would exhaust all the relations and possible consequences of a deed to the very limits of human foresight, cripples the power of acting; as Hamlet himself expresses it:—

And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought;
And enterprises of great pith and moment,
With this regard, their current turns awry,
And lose the name of action.

Respecting Hamlet's character, I cannot, according to the views of the poet as I understand them, pronounce altogether so favourable a sentence as Goethe's. He is, it is true, a mind of high cultivation, a prince of royal manners, endowed with the finest sense of propriety, susceptible of a noble ambition, and open in the highest degree to enthusiasm for the foreign excellence in which he is deficient. He acts the part of madness with inimitable superiority; while he convinces the persons who are sent to examine him of his loss of reason, merely because he tells them unwelcome truths, and rallies them with the most caustic wit. But in the resolutions which he so often embraces and always leaves unexecuted, the weakness of his volition is evident; he does himself only justice when he says there is no greater dissimilarity, than between himself and Hercules. He is not solely impelled by necessity to artifice and dissimulation, he has a natural inclination to go crooked ways; he is a hypocrite towards himself: his far-fetched scruples are often mere prettexts to cover his want of determination; thoughts, as he says on a different occasion, which have

—but one part wisdom
And ever three parts coward.—

He has been chiefly condemned for his harshness in repulsing the love of Ophelia, to which he himself gave risc, and for his unfeelingness at her death. But he is too much overwhelmed with his own sorrow to have any compassion to spare for others: his indifference gives us by no means the measure of his internal perturbation. On the other hand, we evidently perceive in him a malicious joy, when he has succeeded more through necessity and accident, which are alone able to impel him to quick and decisive measures, than from the merit of his courage in getting rid of his enemies; for so he expresses himself after the murder of Polonius, and respecting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet has no firm belief either in himself or in anything else: from expressions of religious confidence he passes over to sceptical doubts; he believes in the Ghost of his father when he sees it, and as soon as it has disappeared, it appears to him almost in the light of a deception.* He has even got so far as to say, "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so;" the poet loses himself with him in the labyrinth of thought, in which we neither find end nor beginning. The stars themselves, from the course of events, afford no answer to the questions so urgently proposed to them. A voice, commissioned as it would appear by heaven from another world, demands vengeance for a monstrous enormity, and the demand remains without effect; the criminals are at last punished, but, as it were, by an accidental blow, and not in a manner requisite to announce with solemnity a warning example of justice to the world; irresolute foresight, cunning treachery, and impetuous rage, are hurried on to the same destruction; the less guilty or the innocent are equally involved in the general destruction. The destiny of humanity is there exhibited as a gigantic sphinx, which threatens to precipitate whoever is unable to solve her dreadful enigma into the abyss of scepticism.

As one example of the many niceties of Shakspeare which have never been understood, I may allude to the style in which the speech of the player respecting Hecuba is conceived. It has been the subject of much controversy among the commentators, whether this was borrowed from Shakspeare himself or from others, and whether, in the praise of the piece of which it is

* It has been censured as a contradiction, that Hamlet in the soliloquy on self-murder should say

The undiscover'd country from whose bourne
No traveller returns——

For was not the Ghost a returned traveller? Shakspeare however purposely wished to show, that Hamlet could not fix himself in any conviction of any kind whatever.

supposed to be a part, he was speaking seriously, or merely meant to ridicule the tragical bombast of his contemporaries. It never occurred to them that this speech must not be judged of by itself, but in connection with the place where it is introduced. To distinguish it as dramatic poetry in the play itself, it was necessary that it should rise above its dignified poetry in the same proportion that the theatrical elevation does above simple nature.—Hence Shakspeare has composed the play in Hamlet altogether in sententious rhymes full of antitheses. But this solemn and measured tone did not suit a speech in which violent emotion ought to prevail, and the poet had no other expedient than the one of which he made choice: overcharging the pathos. The language of the speech in question is certainly falsely emphatical; but yet this fault is so mixed up with true grandeur, that a player practised in calling forth in himself artificially the imitated emotions may certainly be carried away by it. Besides, it will hardly be believed that Shakspeare knew so little of his art, as not to be aware that a tragedy in which Æneas had to make a lengthened epic relation of a transaction that happened so long before as the destruction of Troy, could neither be dramatical nor theatrical.

Of *Mucbeth* I have already spoken once in passing, and who could exhaust the praise of this sublime work? Since *The Furies* of Æschylus, nothing so grand and terrible has ever been composed. The Witches are not, it is true, divine Eumenides, and are not intended to be so: they are ignoble and vulgar instruments of hell. A German poet therefore very ill understood their meaning, when he transformed them into mongrel beings a mixture of fates, furies, and enchantresses, and clothed them with tragical dignity. Let no man lay hand on Shakspeare's works to change anything essential in them; he will be sure to punish himself. The bad is rascally odious, and to endeavour in any manner to ennoble it is to violate the laws of propriety. Hence, in my opinion, Dante, and even Tasso, have been much more successful in their portraiture of Dæmons than Milton. Whether the age of Shakspeare still believed in witchcraft and ghosts is a matter of perfect indifference for the justification of the use which in *Hamlet* and *Mucbeth* he has made of pre-existing traditions. No superstition can ever be prevalent and widely diffused through ages and nations without having a foundation in human nature: on this foundation the poet builds: he calls up from their hidden abysses that dread of the unknown, that presage of a dark side of nature, and a world of spirits, which philosophy now imagines it has altogether exploded. In this manner he is in some degree both the portrayer and the philosopher of a superstition,

that is, not the philosopher who denies and turns into ridicule, but, which is still more difficult, who distinctly exhibits its origin to us in apparently irrational and yet natural opinions. But when he ventures to make arbitrary changes in these popular traditions, he altogether forfeits his right to them, and merely holds up his own peculiarities to our ridicule. Shakspeare's picture of the witches is truly magical: in the short scenes where they enter, he has created for them a peculiar language, which, although composed of the usual elements, still seems to be a collection of formulæ of incantation. The sound of the words, the accumulation of rhymes, and the rhythmus of the verse, form as it were the hollow music of a dreary dance of witches. He has been abused for introducing the names of disgusting objects: but he who supposes that the kettle of the witches can be made effective with agreeable aromatics, has no better understanding of the subject, than those who are desirous that hell should sincerely and honourably give good advice. These repulsive things, from which the imagination shrinks back, are here a symbol of the hostile powers which operate in nature, and the mental horror outweighs the repugnance of our senses. The witches discourse with one another like women of the very lowest class, for this was the class to which witches are supposed to belong; when however they address Macbeth their tone assumes more elevation: their predictions, which they either themselves pronounce, or allow their apparitions to deliver, have all the obscure brevity, the majestic solemnity, by which oracles have in all times contrived to inspire mortals with reverential awe. We here see that the witches are merely instruments; they are governed by an invisible spirit, or the operation of such great and dreadful events would be above their sphere. To what intent did Shakspeare assign the same place to them in his play, which they occupy in the history of Macbeth as related in the old chronicles? A monstrous crime is committed: Duncan, a venerable old man, and the best of kings, is murdered by his subject, whom he has loaded with honours and rewards, in defenceless sleep, under the hospitable roof. Natural motives alone seem inadequate, or he must have portrayed the perpetrator as a most hardened villain. Shakspeare wished to exhibit a more sublime picture to us: an ambitious but noble hero, who yields to a deep-laid hellish temptation; and all the crimes to which he is impelled by necessity, to secure the fruits of his first crime, cannot altogether eradicate in him the stamp of native heroism. He has therefore given a threefold division to the guilt of that crime. The first idea comes from that being whose whole activity is guided by a lust of wickedness. The weird sisters surprise Macbeth in the moment

of intoxication after his victory, when his love of glory has been gratified; they cheat his eyes by exhibiting to him as the work of fate what can only in reality be accomplished by his own deed and gain credence for their words by the immediate fulfilment of the first prediction. The opportunity for murdering the king immediately offers itself; the wife of Macbeth conjures him not to let it slip: she urges him on with a fiery eloquence, which has all those sophisms at command that serve to throw a false grandeur over crime. Little more than the mere execution falls to the share of Macbeth; he is driven to it as it were in a state of commotion in which his mind is bewildered. Repentance immediately follows, nay, even precedes the deed, and the stings of his conscience leave him no rest either night or day. But he is now fairly entangled in the snares of hell; it is truly frightful to behold that Macbeth, who once as a warrior could spurn at death, now that he dreads the prospect of the life to come,* clinging with growing anxiety to his earthly existence, the more miserable it becomes, and pitilessly removing out of his way whatever to his dark and suspicious mind seems to threaten danger. However much we may abhor his actions, we cannot altogether refuse to sympathize with the state of his mind; we lament the ruin of so many noble qualities, and even in his last defence we are compelled to admire in him the struggle of a brave will with a cowardly conscience. We might believe that we witness in this tragedy the over-ruling destiny of the ancients entirely according to their ideas: the whole originates in a supernatural influence, to which the subsequent events seem inevitably linked. We even find again here the same ambiguous oracles which, by their literal fulfilment, deceive those who confide in them. Yet it may be shown that the poet has displayed more enlightened views in his work. He wishes to show that the conflict of good and evil in this world can only take place by the permission of Providence, which converts the curse that individual mortals draw down on their heads into a blessing to others. An accurate scale is followed in the retaliation. Lady Macbeth, who of all the human beings is the most guilty participator in the murder of the king, falls through the horrors of her conscience into a state of incurable bodily and mental disease; she dies, unlamented by her husband, with all the symptoms of reprobation. Macbeth is still found worthy of dying the death of a hero on the field of battle. The noble Macduff is allowed the satisfaction of saving his country by punishing with his own hand the tyrant who destroyed his wife and his children. Banquo atones for the

* We'd jump the life to come.

ambitious curiosity which prompted him to wish to know his glorious descendants by an early death, as he thereby rouses Macbeth's jealousy; but he preserved his mind pure from the bubbles of the witches: his name is blessed in his race, destined to enjoy for a long succession of ages that royal dignity which Macbeth could only hold during his own life. In the progress of the action, this piece is altogether the reverse of *Hamlet*: it strides forward with amazing rapidity, from the first catastrophe (for Duncan's murder may be called a catastrophe) to the last. "Thought, and done!" is the general motto; for as Macbeth says,

The flighty purpose never is o'ertook,
Unless the deed go with it.

In every feature we see a vigorous heroic age in the hardy North which steels every nerve. The precise duration of the action cannot be ascertained,—years perhaps according to the story; but we know that to the imagination the most crowded time appears always the shortest. Here we can hardly conceive how so very much can be compressed into so narrow a space; not merely external events,—the very innermost recesses of the minds of the persons of the drama are laid open to us. It is as if the drags were taken from the wheels of time, and they rolled along without interruption in their descent. Nothing can equal the power of this picture in the excitation of horror. We need only allude to the circumstances attending the murder of Duncan, the dagger that hovers before the eyes of Macbeth, the vision of Banquo at the feast, the Madness of Lady Macbeth; what can we possibly say on the subject that will not rather weaken the impression? Such scenes stand alone, and are to be found only in this poet; otherwise the tragic muse might exchange her mask for the head of Medusa.

I wish merely to point out as a secondary circumstance the prudent dexterity of Shakspeare, who knew how to flatter a king by a work of which the poetical views are evident in every part of the plan. James the First derived his lineage from Banquo; he was the first who united the threefold sceptre of England, Scotland, and Ireland: this is shown in the magical vision, when a long series of glorious successors is promised to him. Even the power of the English kings to heal certain maladies by the touch, which James pretended to have inherited from Edward the Confessor, and on which he set a great value, is mentioned in a natural manner.*—With such occasional pieces we may well

* The naming of Edward the Confessor gives us at the same time the epoch in which these historically accredited transactions are made to take place. The

- allow ourselves to be pleased without fearing any danger of poetry: by similar allusions Æschylus endeavoured to recommend the Areopagus, to his fellow-citizens, and Sophocles to celebrate the glory of Athens.

As terror in *Macbeth* reaches its utmost height, in *King Lear* the science of compassion is exhausted. The principal characters here are not those who act, but those who suffer. We have not in this, as in most tragedies, the picture of a calamity in which the sudden blows of fate seem still to honour the head whom they strike, in which the loss is always accompanied by some flattering consolation in the memory of the former possession; but a fall from the highest elevation into the deepest abyss of misery, where humanity is stripped of all external and internal advantages, and given up a prey to naked helplessness. The threefold dignity of a king, an old man, and a father, is dishonoured by the cruel ingratitude of his unnatural daughters; the old Lear, who out of a foolish tenderness has given away everything, is driven out to the world a wandering beggar; the childish imbecility to which he was fast advancing changes into the wildest insanity, and when he is saved from the disgraceful destitution to which he was abandoned it is too late: the kind consolations of filial care and attention and true friendship are now lost on him; his bodily and mental powers are destroyed beyond all hope of recovery, and all that now remains to him of life is the capability of loving and suffering beyond measure. What a picture we have in the meeting of Lear and Edgar in a tempestuous night and in a wretched hovel! Edgar, a youth, by the wicked arts of his brother and his father's blindness, has fallen so low from the rank to which his birth entitled him as Lear; and he is reduced to assume the disguise of a beggar tormented by evil spirits as the only means of escaping pursuit. The King's fool, notwithstanding the voluntary degradation which is implied in his situation, is, after Kent, Lear's most faithful associate, his wisest counsellor. This good-hearted fool clothes reason with the livery of his motley garb; the high-born beggar acts the part of insanity; and both, were they even in reality what they seem, would still be enviable in comparison with the King, who feels that the violence of his grief threatens to overpower his reason. The meeting of Edgar with the blinded Gloucester is equally heart-rending; nothing can be more affecting than to see the ejected son become the father's guide, and the good angel,

ruins of Macbeth's palace are yet standing at Inverness; the present Earls of Fife are the descendants of the valiant Macduff, and down to the union of Scotland with England they were in the enjoyment of peculiar privileges for their merits towards the crown.

who under the disguise of insanity, by an ingenious and pious fraud, saves him from the horror and despair of self-murder. But who can possibly enumerate all the different combinations and situations by which our minds are stormed by the poet? I will only make one observation respecting the structure of the whole. The story of Lear and his daughters was left by Shakspeare exactly as he found it in a fabulous tradition, with all the features characteristic of the simplicity of old times. But in that tradition there is not the slightest trace of the story of Gloster and his sons, which was derived by Shakspeare from another source. The incorporation of the two stories has been censured as destructive of the unity of action. But whatever contributes to the intrigue or the *dénouement* must always possess unity. And with what ingenuity and skill the two main parts of the composition are dovetailed into one another! The pity felt by Gloster for the fate of Lear becomes the means which enables his son Edmund to effect his complete destruction, and affords the outcast Edgar an opportunity of being the saviour of his father. On the other hand, Edmund is active in the cause of Regan and Gonerill; and the criminal passion which they both entertain for him induces them to execute justice on each other and on themselves. The laws of the drama have therefore been sufficiently complied with; but that is the least: it is the very combination which constitutes the sublime beauty of the work. The two cases resemble each other in the main: an infatuated father is blind towards his well disposed child, and the unnatural offspring, to whom he gives the preference, requite him by the destruction of his entire happiness. But all the circumstances are so different that these stories, while they make an equal impression on the heart, form a complete contrast for the imagination. Were Lear alone to suffer from his daughters, the impression would be limited to the powerful compassion felt by us for his private misfortune. But two such unheard of examples taking place at the same time have the appearance of a great commotion in the moral world: the picture becomes gigantic, and fills us with such alarm as we should entertain at the idea that the heavenly bodies might one day fall out of their regular orbits. To save in some degree the honour of human nature, Shakspeare never wishes that his spectators should forget that the story takes place in a dreary and barbarous age: he lays particular stress on the circumstance that the Britons of that day were still heathens, although he has not made all the remaining circumstances to coincide learnedly with the time which he has chosen. From this point of view we must judge of many coarsenesses in expression and manners; for instance, the immodest manner in which Gloster acknowledges his bastard, Kent's quarrel with the Stew-

ard, and more especially the cruelty personally exercised on Gloster by the Duke of Cornwall. Even the virtue of the honest Kent bears the stamp of an iron age, in which the good and the bad display the same ungovernable strength. Great qualities have not been superfluously assigned to the King; the poet could command our sympathy for his situation without concealing what he had done to bring himself into it. Lear is cholerick, overbearing, and almost childish from age, when he drives out his youngest daughter because she will not join in the hypocritical exaggeration of her sisters. But he has a warm and affectionate heart, which is susceptible of the most fervent gratitude; and even rays of a high and kingly disposition burst forth from the eclipse of his understanding. Of the heavenly beauty of soul of Cordelia, pronounced in so few words, I will not venture to speak; she can only be named along with Antigone. Her death has been thought too cruel; and in England the piece is so far altered in acting that she remains victorious and happy. I must own, I cannot conceive what ideas of art and dramatic connection those persons have who suppose that we can at pleasure tack a double conclusion to a tragedy; a melancholy one for hard-hearted spectators, and a merry one for souls of a softer mould. After surviving so many sufferings, Lear can only die in a tragical manner from his grief for the death of Cordelia; and if he is also to be saved and to pass the remainder of his days in happiness, the whole loses its signification. According to Shakspeare's plan the guilty, it is true, are all punished, for wickedness destroys itself; but the auxiliary virtues are everywhere too late, or overmatched by the cunning activity of malice. The persons of this drama have only such a faint belief in Providence as heathens may be supposed to have; and the poet here wishes to show us that this belief acquires a wider range than the dark pilgrimage on earth to be established in its utmost extent.

These five tragedies of which I have just spoken are deservedly the most celebrated of the works of Shakspeare. In the three last more especially, we have a display of an elevation of genius which may almost be said to exceed the powers of human nature; the mind is as much lost in the contemplation of all the heights and depths of these works as our feelings are overpowered by the first impression which they produce. However, of his historical plays some possess a high degree of tragical perfection, and all are distinguished by peculiar excellencies.

In the three Roman pieces, *Coriolanus*, *Julius Cæsar*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, the moderation with which Shakspeare excludes foreign appendages and arbitrary suppositions, and yet fully satisfies the wants of the stage, is particularly deserving of

our admiration. These plays are the very thing itself; and under the apparent artlessness of adhering closely to history as he found it, an uncommon degree of art is concealed. Of every historical transaction Shakspeare knows how to seize the true poetical point of view, and to give unity and rounding to a series of events detached from the immeasurable extent of history without in any degree changing them. The public life of ancient Rome is called up from its grave, and exhibited before our eyes with the utmost grandeur and freedom of the dramatic form, and the heroes of Plutarch are ennobled by the most eloquent poetry.

In *Coriolanus* we have more comic intermixtures than in the others, as the many-headed multitude plays here a considerable part; and when Shakspeare portrays the blind movements of the people in a mass, he almost always gives himself up to his merry humour. To the plebeians, whose folly is certainly sufficiently conspicuous already, the original old satirist Menenius is added by way of abundance. This gives rise to droll scenes of a description altogether peculiar, and which are alone compatible with such a political drama; for instance, when Coriolanus, to obtain the consulate, must solicit the lower order of citizens whom he holds in contempt for their cowardice in war, but cannot so far master his haughty disposition as to assume the customary humility, and yet extorts from them their votes.

I have already shown* that the piece of *Julius Cæsar*, to complete the action, must be continued to the fall of Brutus and Cassius. Cæsar is not the hero of the piece, but Brutus. The amiable beauty of this character, his feeling and patriotic heroism, are portrayed with peculiar care. Yet the poet has pointed out with great nicety the superiority of Cassius over Brutus in independent volition and discernment in judging of human affairs; that the latter from the purity of his mind and his conscientious love of justice, is unfit to be the head of a party in a state entirely corrupted; and that these very faults give an unfortunate turn to the cause of the conspirators. Several ostentatious speeches in the part of Cæsar have been censured as unsuitable. But as he never appears in action, we have no other measure of his greatness than the impression which he makes upon the rest of the characters, and his peculiar confidence in himself. In this Cæsar was by no means deficient, as we learn from history and his own writings; but he displayed it more in the easy ridicule of his enemies than in pompous discourses. The theatrical effect of this play is injured by the falling off in some degree of the last two acts compared with the preceding in external

* See page 186.

splendour and rapidity. The first appearance of Cæsar in a festal dress, when the music stops and all are silent whenever he opens his mouth, and the few words which he utters are received as oracles, is truly magnificent; the conspiracy is a true conspiracy, that in stolen interviews and in the dead of night prepares the blow which is to be struck in open day, and which is to change the constitution of the world; the confused thronging before the murder of Cæsar, the general agitation even of the perpetrators after the deed, are portrayed in a most masterly manner; with the funeral procession and the speech of Antony the effect reaches its utmost height. Cæsar's shade is the more powerful in avenging his fall than he himself was in guarding against it. After the overthrow of the external splendour and greatness of the conqueror and ruler of the world, the internal grandeur of character of Brutus and Cassius are all that remain to fill the stage and occupy the minds of the spectators: they stand there in some degree alone, suitably to their name, as the last of the Romans; and the forming a great and hazardous determination is more powerfully calculated to excite our expectation, than the supporting the consequences of the deed with heroic firmness.

Antony and Cleopatra may, in some measure, be considered as a continuation of *Julius Cæsar*: the two principal characters of *Antony and Augustus* are equally sustained in both pieces. *Antony and Cleopatra* is a play of great extent; the progress is less simple than in *Julius Cæsar*. The fulness and variety of political and warlike events, to which the union of the three divisions of the Roman world under one master necessarily gave rise, were perhaps too great to admit of being clearly exhibited in one dramatic picture. In this consists the great difficulty of the historical drama:—it must be a crowded extract, and a living developement of history:—the difficulty however has generally been successfully overcome by Shakspeare. But here many things, which are transacted in the back ground, are merely alluded to, in a manner which supposes an intimate acquaintance with the history; and a work of art should contain everything necessary for fully understanding it within itself. Many persons of historical importance are merely introduced in passing; the preparatory and concurring circumstances are not sufficiently collected into masses to avoid distracting our attention. The principal personages, however, are most emphatically distinguished by lineament and colouring, and powerfully arrest the imagination. In Antony we observe a mixture of great qualities, weaknesses, and vices; violent ambition and ebullitions of magnanimity: we see him sunk in luxurious enjoyments and nobly

ashamed of his own aberrations,—manning himself to resolutions not unworthy of himself, which are always shipwrecked against the seductions of an artful woman. It is Hercules in the chains of Omphale, drawn from the fabulous heroic ages into history, and invested with the Roman costume. The seductive arts of Cleopatra are in no respect veiled over; she is an ambiguous being made up of royal pride, female vanity, luxury, inconstancy, and true attachment. Although the mutual passion of herself and Antony is without moral dignity, it still excites our sympathy as an insurmountable fascination:—they seem formed for each other, and Cleopatra is as remarkable for her seductive charms as Antony for the splendour of his deeds. As they die for each other, we forgive them for having lived for each other. The open and lavish character of Antony is admirably contrasted with the heartless littleness of Octavius Cæsar, whom Shakspeare seems to have completely seen through without allowing himself to be led astray by the fortune and fame of Augustus.

Timon of Athens, and *Troilus and Cressida*, are not historical plays; but we cannot properly call them either tragedies or comedies. By the selection of the materials from antiquity they have some affinity to the Roman pieces, and hence I have hitherto abstained from mentioning them.

Timon of Athens, of all the works of Shakspeare, possesses most the character of satire:—a laughing satire in the picture of the parasites and flatterers, and a Juvenalian in the bitterness and the imprecations of Timon against the ingratitude of a false world. The story is treated in a very simple manner, and is definitely divided into large masses:—in the first act the joyous life of Timon, his noble and hospitable extravagance, and the throng of every description of suitors to him; in the second and third acts his embarrassment, and the trial which he is thereby reduced to make of his supposed friends, who all desert him in the hour of need;—in the fourth and fifth acts, Timon's flight to the woods; his misanthropical melancholy, and his death. The only thing which may be called an episode is the banishment of Alcibiades, and his return by force of arms. However they are both examples of ingratitude,—the one of a state towards its defender, and the other of private friends to their benefactor. As the merits of the general towards his fellow-citizens suppose more strength of character than those of the generous prodigal, their respective behaviours are not less different: Timon frets himself to death, Alcibiades regains his lost dignity by violence. If the poet very properly sides with Timon against the common practice of the world, he is, on the other hand, by no means disposed to spare Timon. Timon was a fool in his generosity; he

is a madman in his discontent: he is everywhere wanting in the wisdom which enables a man in all things to observe the due measure. Although the truth of his extravagant feelings is proved by his death, and though when he digs up a treasure he spurns at the wealth which seems again to solicit him, we yet see distinctly enough that the vanity of wishing to be singular, in both the parts that he plays, had some share in his liberal self-forgetfulness, as well as his anchoritical seclusion. This is particularly evident in the incomparable scene where the cynic Apemantus visits Timon in the wilderness. They have a sort of competition with each other in their trade of misanthropy: the Cynic reproaches the impoverished Timon with having been merely driven by necessity to take to the way of living which he had long been following of his free choice, and Timon cannot bear the thought of being merely an imitator of the Cynic. As in this subject the effect could only be produced by an accumulation of similar features, in the variety of the shades an amazing degree of understanding has been displayed by Shakspeare. What a powerfully diversified concert of flatteries and empty testimonies of devotedness! It is highly amusing to see the suitors, whom the ruined circumstances of their patron had dispersed, immediately flock to him again when they learn that he has been revisited by fortune. In the speeches of Timon, after he is undeceived, all the hostile figures of language are exhausted,—it is a dictionary of eloquent imprecations.

Troilus and Cressida is the only play of Shakspeare which he has allowed to be printed without being previously represented. It seems as if he here for once wished, without caring for theatrical effect, to satisfy the nicety of his peculiar wit, and the inclination to a certain guile, if I may say so, in the characterization. The whole is one continued irony of the crown of all heroic tales, the tale of Troy. The contemptible nature of the origin of the Trojan war, the laziness and discord with which it was carried on, so that the siege was made to last ten years, by the noble descriptions, the sage and ingenious maxims with which the work overflows, and the high ideas which the heroes entertain of themselves and each other, are only placed in the clearer light. The stately behaviour of Agamemnon, the irritation of Menelaus, the experience of Nestor, the cunning of Ulysses, are all productive of no effect; when they have at last arranged a combat between the coarse braggart Ajax and Hector, the latter will not fight in good earnest as Ajax is his cousin. Achilles is treated worst: after having long stretched himself out in arrogant idleness, and passed his time in the company of Thersites the buffoon, he falls upon Hector at a moment when he is defenceless,

and kills him by means of his myrmidons. In all this let no man conceive that any indignity was intended to the venerable Homer. Shakspeare had not the Iliad before him, but the chivalrous romances of the Trojan war derived from Dares Phrygius. From this source also he took the love-intrigue of *Troilus and Cressida*, a story at one time so popular in England that the name of Troilus had become proverbial for faithful and ill requited love, and Cressida for female falsehood. The name of the agent between them, Pandarus, has even been adopted into the English language to signify those personages (*panders*) who dedicate themselves to similar services for unexperienced persons of both sexes. The endless contrivances of the courteous Pandarus to bring the two lovers together, who do not stand in need of him, as Cressida requires no seduction, are comic in the extreme. The manner in which this treacherous beauty excites while she refuses, and converts the virgin modesty, which she pretends, into a means of seductive allurements, is portrayed in colours extremely elegant, though certainly somewhat voluptuous. Troilus, the pattern of lovers, looks patiently on, while his mistress enters into an intrigue with Diomed. He no doubt swears that he will be revenged; but notwithstanding his violence in the fight next day, he does no harm to any one, and ends with only high-sounding threats. In a word, Shakspeare did not wish, in this heroic comedy, where everything from traditional fame and the pomp of poetry, seems to lay claim to admiration, that any room should be left for esteem and sympathy, if we except, perhaps, the character of Hector; but in this double meaning of the picture, he has afforded us the most choice entertainment.

The dramas derived from the English history are ten in number: one of the most valuable works of Shakspeare, and partly the fruit of his maturest age. I say advisedly, *one* of his works; for the poet has evidently intended them as parts of a great whole. It is, as it were, a historical heroic poem in the dramatic form, of which the separate plays constitute the rhapsodies. The principal features of the events are exhibited with such fidelity; their causes, and even their secret springs, are placed in such a clear light, that we may attain from them a knowledge of history in all its truth, while the living picture makes an impression on the imagination which can never be effaced. But this series of dramas is intended as the vehicle of a much higher and much more general instruction; it affords examples of the political course of the world, applicable to all times. This mirror of kings should be the manual of young princes: they may learn from it the inward dignity of their hereditary vocation, but they will also learn the difficulties of their situation, the dangers of usurpation, the in-

evitable fall of tyranny, which buries itself under its attempts to obtain a firmer foundation; lastly, the ruinous consequences of the weaknesses, errors, and crimes of kings, for whole nations and many subsequent generations. Eight of these plays, from *Richard the Second* to *Richard the Third*, are linked together in an uninterrupted succession, and embrace a most eventful period of nearly a century of English history. The events portrayed in them not only follow one another, but they are linked together in the closest and most exact manner; and the circle of revolts, parties, civil and foreign wars, which began with the deposition of Richard the Second, first ends with the accession of Henry the Seventh to the throne. The negligent government of the first of these monarchs, and his injudicious behaviour towards his own relations, drew upon him the rebellion of Bolingbroke; his dethronement was however altogether unjust in point of form, and in no case could Bolingbroke be considered the true heir of the crown. This shrewd founder of the house of Lancaster never enjoyed, as Henry the Fourth, the fruits of his usurpation in peace: his turbulent barons, the same who aided him in ascending the throne, never afterwards allowed him a moment's repose. On the other hand, he was jealous of the brilliant qualities of his son, and this distrust, more than any real inclination, induced the Prince to give himself up to dissolute society, that he might avoid every appearance of ambition. These two circumstances form the subject of the two divisions of *Henry the Fourth*; the enterprises of the discontented in the serious, and the wild youthful frolics of the heir apparent in the comic scenes. When this warlike Prince ascended the throne under the name of Henry the Fifth, he was determined to assert his ambiguous title; he considered foreign conquests as the best means of guarding against internal disturbances, and this gave rise to the glorious, but more ruinous than profitable, war with France, which Shakspeare has celebrated in the drama of *Henry the Fifth*. The early death of this king, the long minority of Henry the Sixth, and his continual minority in the art of government, brought the greatest misfortunes on England. The dissensions among the Regents, and the wretched administration which was the consequence, occasioned the loss of the French conquests; this brought forward a bold candidate for the crown, whose title was undisputed, if the prescription of three governments is not to be assumed as conferring validity on a usurpation. Such was the origin of the wars between the houses of York and Lancaster, which desolated the kingdom for a number of years, and ended with the victory of the house of York. All this Shakspeare has represented in the three parts of *Henry the Sixth*. Edward

the Fourth shortened his life by excesses, and did not long enjoy the throne purchased at the expense of so many cruel deeds. His brother Richard, who had had a great share in the elevation of the house of York, was not contented with the regency, and his ambition paved a way for him to the throne by treachery and violence; but his gloomy tyranny made him the object of the people's hatred and, at length, drew on him the destruction which he merited. He was conquered by a descendant of the royal house who was unstained by the civil wars, and what might seem defective in his title was atoned for by the merit of freeing his country from a monster. With the accession of Henry the Seventh to the throne, a new epoch of English history begins: the curse seemed at length to be expiated, and the series of usurpations, revolts, and civil wars, all occasioned by the levity with which Richard the Second sported away the crown, was now brought to a termination.

Such is the evident connexion of these eight plays with each other, but they were not however composed in chronological order. According to all appearance, the four last were first written; this is certain, indeed with respect to the three parts of *Henry the Sixth*; and *Richard the Third* is not only from its subject a continuation of these, but is also composed in the same style. Shakspeare went then back to *Richard the Second*, and with the most careful art connected the second series with the first. The trilogies of the ancients have already given us an example of the possibility of forming a perfect dramatic whole, which shall yet contain allusions to something which goes before, and follows it. In like manner the most of these plays end with a very definite division in the history: *Richard the Second*, with the murder of that King; *the Second Part of Henry the Fourth*, with the ascension to the throne; *Henry the Fifth*, with the conclusion of peace with France; *the First Part of Henry the Sixth*, also, with a treaty of peace; the third, with the murder of Henry, and Edward's elevation to the throne; *Richard the Third*, with his overthrow and death. *The First Part of Henry the Fourth*, and *the Second Part of Henry the Sixth*, are rounded off in a less satisfactory manner. The revolt of the nobles was only half quelled by the overthrow of Percy, and it is therefore continued through the following part of the piece. The victory of York at St. Alban's could as little be considered a decisive event, in the war of the two houses. Shakspeare has fallen into this dramatic imperfection, if we may so call it, for the sake of advantages of much more importance. The picture of the civil war was too great and too rich in dreadful events for a single drama, and yet the uninterrupted series of events offered no more

convenient resting-place. The government of Henry the Fourth might certainly have been comprehended in one piece, but it possesses too little tragical interest, and too little historical splendour, to be attractive, if handled in a serious manner throughout: hence Shakspeare has given to the comic characters belonging to the retinue of Prince Henry, the freest developement, and the half of the space is occupied by this constant interlude between the political events.

The two other historical plays taken from the English history are chronologically separated from this series: King John reigned nearly two centuries before Richard the Second, and between Richard the Third and Henry the Eighth comes the long reign of Henry the Seventh, which Shakspeare justly passed over as susceptible of no dramatic interest. However, these two plays may in some measure be considered as the Prologue and the Epilogue to the other eight. In *King John*, all the political and national motives which play so great a part in the following pieces are already indicated: wars and treaties with France; a usurpation and the tyrannical actions which it draws after it; the influence of the clergy, the factions of the nobles. *Henry the Eighth* again shows us the transition to another age; the policy of modern Europe, a refined court life under a voluptuous monarch, the dangerous situation of favourites who are themselves precipitated after they have assisted in effecting the fall of others; in a word, despotism under milder forms, but not less unjust and cruel. By the prophecies on the birth of Elizabeth, Shakspeare has in some degree brought his great poem on the English history down to his own time, at least as far as such recent events could be yet handled with security. With this view probably, he composed the two plays of *King John** and *Henry the Eighth* at a later period, as an addition to the others.

In *King John* the political and warlike events are dressed out with solemn pomp, for the very reason that they possess but little true grandeur. The falsehood and selfishness of the monarch are evident in the style of the Manifesto. Conventional dignity is most indispensable where personal dignity is wanting. The bastard Faulconbridge is the witty interpreter of this language; he ridicules the secret springs of politics without disapproving of them, for he owns to himself that he is endeavouring to make his fortune by similar means, and wishes rather to belong to the deceivers than the deceived, as in his view of the world there is no

* I mean the piece with this title in the collection of his works. There is an older *King John*, in two parts, of which the former is a re-cast:—perhaps a juvenile work of Shakspeare, though not hitherto acknowledged as such by the English critics. See the disquisitions appended to this Lecture.

other choice. His litigation with his brother respecting the succession of his pretended father, by which he effects his acknowledgement at court as natural son of the most chivalrous King of England, Richard Cœur de Lion, forms a very entertaining and original prelude in the play itself. Amidst so many disguises of real sentiments and so much insincerity of expression, when the poet shows us human nature without a veil, and allows us to take deep views of the innermost recesses of the mind, the impression produced is so much the more deep and powerful. The short scene in which John calls on Hubert to remove out of the way Arthur, his young rival, for the possession of the throne, is superlatively masterly; the cautious criminal hardly ventures to say to himself what he wishes the other to do. The tender and amiable Prince Arthur becomes a sacrifice of unprincipled ambition; his fate excites the warmest sympathy. When Hubert threatens to put out his eyes by a hot iron, and is softened by his prayers, our compassion would almost be too powerful for us were it not sweetened by the pleasing innocence of the childish speeches of Arthur. Constantia's maternal despair on the imprisonment of her son is also of the highest beauty; and even the last moments of John, an unjust and feeble prince whom we can neither respect nor admire, are portrayed in such a manner, that they extinguish our discontent against him, and fill us with serious considerations on the arbitrary deeds and the inevitable fate of mortals.

In *Richard the Second*, Shakspeare exhibits to us a noble kingly nature, at first obscured by levity and the errors of an unbridled youth, and afterwards purified by misfortune and rendered more highly and splendidly illustrious. When he has lost the love and reverence of his subjects, and is on the point of losing also his throne, he then feels with painful inspiration the elevated vocation of the kingly dignity and its prerogative over personal merit and changeable institutions. When the earthly crown has fallen from off his head, he first appears as a king whose innate nobility no humiliation can annihilate. This is felt by a poor groom: he is shocked that his master's favourite horse should have carried the proud Bolingbroke at his coronation; he visits the captive king in the prison, and shames the desertion of the great. The political history of the deposition is represented with extraordinary knowledge of the world;—the ebb of fortune on the one hand, and the swelling tide on the other, which carries everything along with it; while Bolingbroke acts as a king, and his adherents behave to him as if he really were so, he still continues to give out that he comes with his armed band merely for the sake of demanding his birthright and the removal

abuses. The usurpation has been long completed before the word is pronounced, and the thing publicly avowed. The old John of Gaunt is a model of chivalrous truth;—he stands there like a pillar of the olden time which he has outlived. His son, Henry the Fourth, was altogether unlike him: his character is admirably supported throughout the three pieces in which he appears. We see in it that mixture of hardness, moderation, and prudence which in fact enabled him to secure himself on the throne that he had violently usurped; but without openness, without true cordiality, and incapable of noble ebullitions, he was so little able to render his government beloved, that the deposed Richard was even wished back again.

The first part of *Henry the Fourth* is particularly brilliant in the serious scenes, from the contrast between two young heroes, Prince Henry and Percy with the characteristical name of Hotspur. All the amiability and attractiveness is certainly on the side of the Prince; however familiar he makes himself with bad company, we can never mistake him for one of them; the ignoble touches, but does not contaminate him, and his wildest freaks appear merely as witty tricks by which his restless mind sought to burst through the inactivity to which he was constrained; for on the first occasion which awakes him out of this unruly levity, he distinguishes himself without effort in the most chivalrous manner. Percy's boisterous valour is not without a mixture of rude manners, arrogance, and boyish obstinacy; but these errors, which prepare for him an early death, cannot disfigure the majestic image of his noble youth: we are carried along by his fire at the very moment we are censuring him. Why so formidable a revolt against an unpopular and properly an illegitimate prince was not attended with success, has been admirably shown by Shakspeare: the superstitious imaginations of Glendower respecting himself, the effeminacy of young Mortimer, the ungovernable disposition of Percy who will listen to no prudent counsel, the want of determination of his older friends, the want of unity of motive and plan, are all characterized by traits of the most delicate description, which yet however it is impossible to mistake. After Percy has left the scene, the splendour of the enterprise is, it is true, at an end; there remain only subordinate participators who are reduced to subjection by Henry the Fourth, more by policy than warlike achievements. To overcome this sterility of subject, Shakspeare was obliged to employ great art in the second part of the play, as he never allowed himself to adorn history in an arbitrary manner, more than the dramatic form rendered indispensably requisite. The piece is opened by confused accounts from the field of battle; the powerful impression

of Percy's fall, the name and fame of whom was peculiarly adapted to be the watchword of a bold enterprise, make him in some degree an acting personage after his death. In the last acts we are occupied by the gnawings of conscience of the dying King, his uneasiness from the behaviour of the Prince, and the clearing up of the misunderstanding between father and son, which give rise, to several affecting scenes. All this, however, would be insufficient to fill the stage, if the serious events were not interrupted by a comedy which runs through both parts of the play, which is enriched from time to time with new figures, and which first comes to its catastrophe at the conclusion of the whole, namely, when Henry the Fifth, immediately after ascending the throne, banishes to a due distance the companions of his youthful extravagance, who had promised to themselves the highest favour from him.

Falstaff is the summit of Shakspeare's comic invention. He has continued this character throughout three plays, and exhibited him in every variety of situation without exhausting himself; the figure is drawn so definitely and individually, that to the mere reader it affords the complete impression of a personal acquaintance. Falstaff is the most agreeable and entertaining knave that ever was portrayed. His contemptible qualities are not disguised: old, lecherous, and dissolute; corpulent beyond measure, and always attentive to cherish his body by eating and sleeping; constantly in debt, and everything but conscientious in the choice of the means by which money is to be procured; a cowardly soldier, and a lying braggart; a flatterer to the face, and a satirist behind the backs of his friends, and yet we are never disgusted with him. We see that his tender care of himself is without any mixture of malice towards others; he will only not be disturbed in the pleasing repose of his sensuality, and this he obtains through the activity of his understanding. Always on the alert and good-humoured, ever ready to crack jokes on others, and to enter into those of which he is himself the subject, so that he justly boasts he is not only witty himself, but the cause of wit in others, he is an admirable companion for youthful idleness and levity. Under a helpless exterior, he conceals an extremely acute mind; he has always some dexterous turn at command whenever any of his free jokes begin to give displeasure; he is shrewd in his distinctions, between those from whom he has favours to solicit, and those over whom he may assume a familiar ascendancy. He is so convinced that the part which he plays can only pass under the cloak of wit, that even when alone, he is never altogether serious, but gives the drollest colouring to his love intrigues, his relations with

others, and his sensual philosophy. Witness his inimitable soliloquies on honour, on the influence of wine on bravery, his descriptions of the beggarly vagabonds whom he enlisted, of Justice Shallow, &c. Falstaff has a whole court of amusing caricatures about him, who make their appearance by turns, without ever throwing him into the shade. The adventure in which the Prince, under the disguise of a robber, compels him to give up the spoil which he had just taken, the scene where the two act the part of the King and Prince; Falstaff's behaviour in the field, his mode of raising recruits, his patronage of Justice Shallow, which afterwards takes such an unfortunate turn:—all this forms a series of characteristic scenes of the most original description, full of pleasantry, and full of nice and ingenious observation, scenes such as could only find a place in a historical play like the present.

Several of the comic parts of Henry the Fourth are continued in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. This piece is said to have been composed by Shakspeare, in compliance with the request of Queen Elizabeth* who admired the character of Falstaff, and wished to see him exhibited once more, and in love. In love, properly speaking, Falstaff could not be; but he could pretend that he was for other purposes, and at all events imagine that he was the object of love. He pays his court here, as a favoured Knight, to two married ladies, who lay their heads together to listen in appearance to his addresses, for the sake of making him the subject of their just mirth. The whole plan of the intrigue is therefore derived from the ordinary circle of comedy, but yet interwoven in a very rich and artificial manner with another love affair. The circumstance which has been so much admired in Molière's school of women, that a jealous individual should be made the constant confidant of the progress of his rival, had already been introduced into this play, and certainly with much more probability. Yet I would not be understood to maintain that this was invented by Shakspeare: it is one of those circumstances which must almost be considered as the common good of comedy, and everything depends on the delicacy and humour with which they are executed. That Falstaff should fall so repeatedly into the snare gives us a less advantageous opinion of his understanding than we had from the foregoing pieces; but it

* We know with certainty, that it was acted before the Queen. Many local descriptions of Windsor and its neighbourhood, and an allusion in which the Order of the Garter is very poetically celebrated, make it credible that the play was destined to be first represented at the palace of Windsor, where the Knights of the Garter have their hall of meeting on the occasion of some festival of the Order.

will not be considered improbable, when once we admit of the first infatuation on which the whole piece is founded, namely, that he believes himself qualified to inspire a passion. This leads him, notwithstanding his age, his corpulency, and his dislike of personal inconveniences and dangers, to venture on an undertaking which requires the boldness and activity of youth; and the situations occasioned by this infatuation are droll beyond all description. Of all the pieces of Shakspeare, this approaches the most to the species of pure comedy: it is altogether confined to the English manners of that day, and to domestic relations; the characters are almost all comic, and the dialogue, with the exception of a couple of short love scenes, is written in prose. But we see that it was a principle of Shakspeare to make none of his compositions a mere imitation of the prosaic world, and to strip them of all poetical decoration: he has elevated the conclusion of the comedy by a wonderful intermixture, which suited the place where it was probably first represented. A popular superstition is made the means of a fanciful mystification* of Falstaff; disguised as the Ghost of a Hunter who, with ragged horns, wanders about in the woods of Windsor, he is to wait for his frolicsome mistress; in this plight he is surprised by a chorus of boys and girls disguised like fairies, who agreeably to the popular belief, are holding their midnight dances, and who pinch and torture him during their elegant songs. This is the last affront put upon Falstaff; and with this contrivance the conclusion of the second love affair is made in a most ingenious manner to depend.

King Henry the Fifth is visibly the favourite hero of Shakspeare in the English history: he portrays him endowed with every chivalrous and kingly virtue; open, sincere, affable, yet still disposed to innocent raillery as a sort of reminiscence of his youth, in the intervals between his dangerous and renowned achievements. To bring his life after his ascent to the crown on the stage was, however, attended with great difficulty. The conquests in France were the only distinguished event of his reign; and war is much more an epic than a dramatic object. For wherever men act in masses against each other, the appearance of chance can never wholly be avoided; and it is the business of the drama to exhibit to us determinations which proceed with certain necessity from the reciprocal relations of the different individuals, their characters and passions. In several of the Grecian tragedies, it is true, combats and battles are exhibited, that is, the preparations for them and their results; and in historical plays war, as the *ultima ratio regum*, cannot altogether be

* This word is French; but it has lately been adopted by some English writers.—TRANS.

excluded. Still, however, if we would have dramatic interest, it must only be the means by which something else is accomplished, and not the last aim and substance of the whole. For instance, in *Macbeth*, the battles which are announced at the very beginning merely serve to heighten the renown of Macbeth and to fire his ambition; and the combats which take place towards the conclusion, before the eyes of the spectator, bring on the destruction of the tyrant. It is the very same in the Roman pieces, in the most of those taken from English history, and wherever Shakspeare has introduced war in a dramatic concatenation. With great insight into the essence of his art he never paints the fortune of war as a blind deity who sometimes favours the one and sometimes the other; without going into the details of the art of war, though he sometimes however ventures on this, he allows us to anticipate the result from the qualities of the general, and their influence on the minds of the soldiers; sometimes he exhibits the issue in the light of a higher will without laying claim to our belief in miracles: the consciousness of a just cause and reliance on the protection of Heaven give courage to the one party, while the presage of a curse hanging over their undertaking weighs down the other.* In *Henry the Fifth* no opportunity was afforded Shakspeare of adopting the last mentioned course, namely, rendering the issue of the war dramatic; but he has availed himself of the first with peculiar care.—Before the battle of Agincourt he paints in the most lively colours the light-minded impatience of the French leaders for the moment of battle, which to them seemed infallibly the moment of victory; on the other hand, he paints the uneasiness of the English King and his army from their desperate situation, coupled with the firm determination, if they are to fall, at least to fall with honour. He applies this as a general contrast between the French and English national characters; a contrast which betrays a partiality for his own nation, excusable in a poet, especially when he is backed with such a glorious document as that of the memorable battle in question. He has surrounded the general events of the war with a fulness of individual, characteristic, and even sometimes comic features. A heavy Scotchman, a hot Irishman, a well-meaning, honourable, but pedantic Welchman, all speaking in their peculiar dialects, are intended to show us that the warlike genius of

* Æschylus with equal wisdom, in the uniformly warlike tragedy of the *Seven before Thebes*, has given to the Theban chiefs foresight, determination, and presence of mind; to their adversaries, arrogant audacity. Hence all the combats, excepting that between Eteocles and Polynices, turn out in favour of the former. The paternal curse, and the blindness to which it gives rise, carry headlong the two brothers to the unnatural strife in which they both fall by the hands of each other.—See page 62.

Henry did not merely carry the English with him, but also the other natives of the two islands, who were either not yet fully united or in no degree subject to him. Several good-for-nothing associates of Falstaff among the dregs of the army either afford an opportunity for proving the strict discipline under Henry, or are sent home in disgrace. But all this variety still seemed to the poet insufficient to animate a play of which the object was a conquest, and nothing but a conquest. He has therefore tacked a prologue (in the technical language of that day a chorus) to the beginning of each act. These prologues, which unite epic pomp and solemnity with lyrical sublimity, and among which the description of the two camps before the battle of Agincourt forms a most admirable night-piece, are intended to keep the spectators constantly in mind that the peculiar grandeur of the actions there described cannot be developed on a narrow stage, and that they must supply the deficiencies of the representation from their own imaginations. As the subject was not properly dramatic, in the form also Shakspeare chose rather to wander beyond the bounds of the species, and to sing, as a poetical herald, what he could not represent to the eye, than to cripple the progress of the action by putting long descriptions in the mouths of the persons of the drama. The confession of the poet that "four or five most vile and ragged foils, right ill disposed, can only disgrace the name of Agincourt" (a scruple which he has overlooked in the occasion of many other great battles, and among others of that of Philippi) brings us here naturally to the question how far, generally speaking, it may be suitable and advisable to represent wars and battles on the stage. The Greeks have uniformly renounced them: as in the whole of their theatrical system they proceeded on ideas of grandeur and dignity, a feeble and petty imitation of the unattainable would have appeared insupportable in their eyes. All fighting with them was consequently merely recounted. The principle of the romantic dramatic poets was altogether different: their wonderful pictures were infinitely larger than their theatrical means of visible execution; they were everywhere obliged to count on the willing imagination of the spectators, and consequently they also relied on them in this point. It is certainly laughable enough that a handful of awkward warriors in mock armour, by means of two or three swords, with which we clearly see they take especial care not to do the slightest injury to one another, should decide the fate of mighty kingdoms. But the opposite extreme is still much worse. If we in reality succeed in exhibiting the tumult of a great battle, the storming of a fort, and the like, in a manner any way calculated to deceive the eye, the power of these sensible impressions

is so great that they render the spectator incapable of bestowing that attention which a poetical work of art demands; and thus the essential is sacrificed to the accessory. We have learned from experience, that whenever cavalry combats are introduced the men soon became secondary personages beside the four-footed players.* Fortunately in Shakspeare's time, the art of converting the yielding boards of the theatre into a riding course had not yet been invented. He tells the spectators in the first prologue in *Henry the Fifth*:—

Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs in the receiving earth.

When Richard the Third utters the famous exclamation,—

A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!

it is no doubt inconsistent to see him both before and afterwards constantly fighting on foot. It is, however, better, perhaps, that the poet and player should by overpowering impressions dispose us to forget this, than by literal exactness to expose themselves to external interruptions. With all the disadvantages which I have mentioned, Shakspeare and several Spanish poets have contrived to derive such great beauties from the immediate representation of war that I cannot bring myself to wish they had abstained from it. A theatrical manager of the present day will have a middle course to follow: his art must, in an especial manner, be directed to make what he shows us appear only as separate groups of a picture which cannot be overlooked; he must convince the spectators that the main action takes place behind the stage; and for this purpose he has easy means at his command in the nearer or more remote sound of warlike music and the din of arms.

However much Shakspeare celebrates the French conquest of Henry, still he has not omitted to hint to us, after his way, the secret springs of this undertaking. Henry, was in want of foreign war to secure himself on the throne; the clergy also wished to keep him employed abroad, and made an offer of rich contributions to prevent the passing of a law which would have deprived them of the half of their revenues. His learned bishops are consequently as ready to prove to him his undisputed right to the crown of France as he is to allow his conscience to be tranquillized by them. They prove that the Salic law is not, and

* The Greeks, it is true, brought horses on the tragic stage, but only in solemn processions, not in the wild disorder of a fight. Agamemnon and Pallas, in *Æschylus*, make their appearance drawn in a chariot with four horses. But their theatres were built on a scale very different from ours.

never was, applicable to France; and the matter is treated in a more succinct and convincing manner than such subjects usually are in manifestoes. After his renowned battles Henry wished to secure his conquests by marriage with a French princess; all that has reference to this is intended for irony in the play. The fruit of this union, from which two nations promised to themselves such happiness in future, was that very feeble Henry the Sixth, under whom everything was so miserably lost. It must not therefore be imagined that it was without the knowledge and will of the poet that a heroic drama turns out a comedy in his hands, and ends in the manner of a comedy with a marriage of convenience.

The three parts of *Henry the Sixth*, as I have already remarked, were much earlier composed than the preceding pieces. Shakspeare's choice fell first on this period of English history so full of misery and horrors of every kind, because the pathetic is naturally more suitable to a young poetical mind than the characteristic. We do not yet find here the whole maturity of his genius; but we certainly find its whole strength. Careless respecting the apparent unconnectedness of contemporary events, he bestows small attention on preparation and developement: all the figures follow in rapid succession, and announce themselves emphatically for what we ought to take them; from scenes of which the effect is sufficiently agitating to form the catastrophe of a less extensive plan, the poet hurries us perpetually on to still more dreadful catastrophes. The First Part contains only the beginning of the parties of the White and Red Rose, under which blooming colours such bloody deeds were afterwards performed; the varying results of the war in France principally fill the stage. The wonderful saviour of her country, Joan of Arc, is portrayed by Shakspeare with the partiality of an Englishman: yet he at first leaves it doubtful whether she has not in reality a heavenly mission; she appears in the pure glory of virgin heroism; she wins over, and this circumstance is of the poet's invention, the Duke of Burgundy to the French cause by her supernatural eloquence; afterwards corrupted by vanity and luxury she has recourse to hellish fiends, and comes to a miserable end. To her is opposed Talbot, a rough iron warrior, who moves us the more powerfully, as in the moment when he is threatened with inevitable death we see all his care tenderly directed to save his son, who performs his first deeds of arms under his eye. After Talbot has in vain sacrificed himself, and the Maid of Orleans has fallen into the hands of the English, the French provinces are completely lost by an impolitic marriage; and with this the piece ends. The conversation between the aged Mor-

timer in prison and Richard Plantagenet, afterwards Duke of York, contains an exposition of the claims of the latter to the throne: considered by itself it is a beautiful tragic elegy.

In the Second Part, the events more particularly prominent are the murder of the honest protector Gloster and its consequences; the death of Cardinal Beaufort; the parting of the Queen from her favourite Suffolk, and his death by the hands of savage pirates; then the insurrection of Jack Cade under an assumed name, and at the instigation of the Duke of York. The short scene where cardinal Beaufort, who is tormented by his conscience on account of the murder of Gloster, is visited on his death-bed by Henry the Sixth is sublime beyond all praise. Can any other poet be named who has drawn aside the curtain of eternity at the close of this life in such an overpowering and awful manner? And yet it is not mere horror with which we are filled, but solemn emotion; we have an exemplification of a blessing and curse in close proximity; the pious King is an image of the heavenly mercy which even in his last moments labours to enter into the soul of the sinner. The adulterous passion of Queen Margaret and Suffolk has been invested with tragical dignity by Shakspeare, and carefully removed from all ignoble ideas of a secondary nature. Without attempting to gloss over the crime of which both are guilty, without seeking to remove our disapprobation of this criminal love, he still, by the magic force of expression, contrives to excite in us a sympathy with their pain. In the insurrection of Cade he has portrayed the behaviour of a popular demagogue, the dreadful ludicrousness of the anarchical tumult of the people, with such convincing truth, that one would believe he was an eye-witness of many of the events of our age which, from ignorance of history, have been considered as without example.

The civil war begins only in the Second part; in the Third he unfolds its whole destructive fury. The picture becomes gloomier and gloomier; and appears at last to be painted rather with blood than with colours. We see with horror that fury gives birth to fury, vengeance to vengeance; and that when all the bonds of human society are torn asunder, even noble nations become hardened to cruelty. The most bitter contempt falls to the lot of the unfortunate; no one affords that compassion to his enemy of which he will shortly himself stand in need. Their party is to all of them, family, country, and religion; their only springs of action. As York, whose ambition is coupled with noble qualities, prematurely perishes, the object of the whole contest is now either to support an imbecile King, or to place on the throne a luxurious monarch, who shortens the dear bought possession by

the gratification of an insatiable voluptuousness. For this the celebrated and magnanimous Warwick spends his chivalrous life; Clifford revenges the death of his father with blood-thirsty filial love; and Richard, for the elevation of his brother, practises those dark deeds by which he is soon after to pave the way to his own greatness. In the midst of the general ruin, of which he has been the innocent cause, King Henry appears like the powerless image of a saint, in whose efficacy no man any longer believes: he can only sigh and weep over the enormities which he witnesses. In his simplicity, however, the gift of prophecy is lent to this pious King: in the moment of his death, at the close of this great tragedy, he prophesies a still more dreadful tragedy with which futurity is pregnant, as distinguished for the poisonous wiles of cold-blooded wickedness as the former for deeds of savage fury.

The part of Richard the Third has become highly celebrated in England from its having been filled by excellent performers, and this has naturally had an influence on the admiration of the piece itself: for many readers of Shakspeare stand in want of good interpreters of the poet to understand him properly. This admiration is certainly, in every respect, well founded, though I cannot help thinking there is an injustice in considering the three parts of *Henry the Sixth* as of small value compared with *Richard the Third*. These four plays were undoubtedly composed in succession, as is proved by the style and the spirit in the manner of handling the subject; the last is definitely announced in the one which precedes it, and is also full of references to it: the same views run through the series; in a word, the whole make together only one single work. Even the deep characterization of Richard is by no means an exclusive advantage of the piece which bears his name: his character is very distinctly drawn in the two last parts of *Henry the Sixth*; nay even his first speeches lead us already to form the most unfavourable prognostications respecting him. He lowers obliquely like a dark thunder-cloud on the horizon, which gradually approaches nearer and nearer, and first pours out the elements of devastation with which it is charged when it hangs over the heads of mortals. Two of the most significant monologues of Richard, and which enable us to draw the most important conclusions respecting his constitution of mind, are to be found in *The Last Part of Henry the Sixth*. Respecting the value and the justice of actions those who are impelled to them by passions may be blind, but wickedness cannot mistake its own essence: Richard as well as Iago, is a villain with full consciousness. That they should say this in so many words, is not perhaps in human nature: but the poet has the right in soliloquies to lend a voice to the most hidden thoughts, otherwise

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of the crown, distinguished by his youth and beauty of his figure, was an almost irresistible conqueror of female hearts. Notwithstanding his pretended remuneration Richard places his chief vanity in being able to please and win over the women, if not by his figure at least by his insinuating discourse. Shakespeare here shows us, with his accustomed acuteness of observation, that human nature, even when it is altogether decided in goodness or wickedness, is still subject to petty infirmities. Richard's most favourite entertainment is to ridicule others, and he possesses satirical wit in an eminent degree. He entertains at bottom a contempt for all mankind, as he is confident of his ability to deceive them whether they may be his instruments or adversaries. In hypocrisy he is particularly fond of using religious forms, as if actuated by a desire of profaning in the service of hell the religion of which he had inwardly abjured the blessings.

So much for the main features of Richard's character. The play named after him embraces also the latter half of the reign of

* What happens however in so many tragedies, where a person is made to declare himself a villain to his confidants, is most decidedly unnatural. He will announce his way of thinking, not however under damning names, but as something that is understood of itself, and is equally approved of by others.

Edward IV., in the whole a period of eight years. It exhibits all the machinations by which Richard obtained the throne, and the deeds which he perpetrated to secure himself in its possession, which lasted however only two years. Shakspeare intended that terror rather than compassion should prevail throughout this tragedy: he has rather gone out of the way of the pathetic scenes which he had at command, than sought after them. Of all the sacrifices to Richard's lust of power, Clarence alone is put to death on the stage: his dream excites a deep horror, and proves the omnipotence of the poet's fancy: his conversation with the murderers is powerfully agitating; but the earlier crimes of Clarence merited death, although not from his brother. The most innocent and unspotted sacrifices are the two Princes: we see but little of them, and their murder is merely related. Anne disappears without our learning anything farther respecting her: she has shown a weakness almost incredible in marrying the murderer of her husband. The parts of Lord Rivers, and other friends of the Queen, are of too secondary a nature to excite a powerful sympathy; Hastings, from his triumph at the fall of his friend, forfeits all title to compassion; Buckingham is the satellite of the tyrant, who is afterwards consigned by him to the axe of the executioner. In the back-ground the widowed Queen Margaret appears, as the fury of the past who calls forth the curse on the future: every calamity which her enemies draw down on each other is a cordial to her revengeful heart. Other female voices join, from time to time, in the lamentations and imprecations. But Richard is the soul or rather the dæmon, of the whole tragedy. He fulfils the promise which he formerly made of leading the murderous Macchiavel to school. Besides the uniform aversion with which he inspires us, he occupies us in the greatest variety of ways by his profound skill in dissimulation, his wit, his prudence, his presence of mind, his quick activity, and his valour. He fights at last against Richmond like a desperado, and dies the honourable death of a hero on the field of battle. Shakspeare could not change this historical issue, and yet it is by no means satisfactory to our moral feelings, as Lessing, when speaking of a German play on the same subject, has very judiciously remarked. How has Shakspeare solved this difficulty? By a wonderful invention he opens a prospect into the other world, and shows us Richard in his last moments already branded with the stamp of reprobation. We see Richard and Richmond in the night before the battle sleeping in their tents; the spirits of those murdered by the tyrant ascend in succession, and pour out their curses against him, and their blessings on his adversaries. These apparitions, are properly merely the dreams of the two generals

rendered visible. It is no doubt contrary to sensible probability that their tents should only be separated, by such a small space; but Shakspeare could reckon on poetical spectators, who were ready to take the breadth of the stage for the distance between two camps, if by such a favour they were to be recompensed by beauties of so sublime a nature as this series of spectres and the soliloquy of Richard on awaking. The catastrophe of *Richard the Third*, is in respect of external events, very like that of *Macbeth*: we have only to compare the complete difference of the manner of treatment to be convinced that Shakspeare has observed in the most accurate manner, poetical justice in the genuine sense of the word, namely, where it signifies the revelation of the invisible blessing or curse which hangs over human sentiments and actions.

Although the four last pieces of the historical series paint later events, yet the plays of *Henry the Fourth* and *Fifth* have in costume and tone, a much more modern appearance. This is partly owing to the number of comic scenes; for the comic must always not only be founded in national, but in contemporary manners. Shakspeare however seems also to have had the same design in the serious part. Bloody revolutions and devastations of civil war appear to posterity as a relapse into an earlier and more uncultivated condition of society, or they are in reality accompanied by such a relapse into unbridled savageness. If therefore the propensity of a young poetical mind to remove its object to a wonderful distance has had an influence on the style in which *Henry the Sixth* and *Richard the Third* are conceived, Shakspeare has been rightly guided by his instinct. As it is peculiar to the epic poem to paint the races of men in times past as colossal in strength of body and resolution, so in these plays, in the voices of a Talbot, a Warwick, a Clifford, and others, we imagine we hear the trumpet of foreign or civil war. The contest of the houses of York and Lancaster was the last raging of feudal independence: for it was the cause of the great, and not of the people, who were only dragged by the former along with them into the divisions. Afterwards the separate was swallowed up in the whole, and no one could any longer, like a Warwick, be a maker of kings. Shakspeare was as profound a historian as a poet; when we compare his *Henry the Eighth* with the preceding pieces, we see distinctly that the English nation during the long peaceable and economical reign of Henry the Seventh, whether from the exhaustion which was the fruit of the civil wars, or from more general European influences, had made a sudden transition from the powerful confusion of the middle age, to the regular tameness of modern times. *Henry the Eighth* has

therefore somewhat of a prosaical appearance; for Shakspeare as an artist, subjected himself always to the quality of his materials. If others of his works, in elevation of fancy, in energy of pathos and character, tower far above this, we have here on the other hand an opportunity of admiring his nice powers of discrimination, and his perfect knowledge of courts and the world. What management was requisite to represent before the eyes of the queen* subjects of such a delicate nature, and in which she was personally so nearly concerned, without however approaching too near to the truth! He has unmasked the tyrannical king, and exhibited him to the intelligent as he actually was: haughty and obstinate, voluptuous and without feeling, extravagant in conferring favours, and revengeful under the pretence of justice; and yet the picture is so dexterously handled that a daughter might take it for favourable. The legitimacy of Elizabeth's birth depended on the invalidity of the first marriage of Henry, and Shakspeare has placed the proceedings respecting his separation from Catharine of Arragon in a very doubtful light. We see clearly that Henry's scruples of conscience are no other than the beauty of Anne Boleyn. Catharine is, properly speaking, the heroine of the piece; she excites the warmest sympathy from her virtue, her defenceless misery, her soft but firm opposition, and her dignified resignation. After her, the fall of Cardinal Woolsey constitutes the principal part of the business. Henry's whole reign was not adapted for dramatic poetry. It would have merely been a repetition of the same scenes: the repudiation, or the execution of his wives, and the fall of his most estimable servants into disfavour, which was usually soon followed by death. Of all for which Henry's life was distinguished, Shakspeare has given us sufficient specimens. But as there is, properly speaking, no division in the history where he breaks off, we must excuse him for giving us a flattery towards the great Elizabeth for a fortunate catastrophe. The piece ends with the general joy at the birth of that Princess, and with prophecies of the felicity which she was afterwards to enjoy or to diffuse. It was only by such a turn that the hazardous liberty of the remainder of the composition could have passed with impunity: Shakspeare was not certainly himself deceived respecting this theatrical delusion. The true con-

* It is quite clear that *Henry the Eighth* was written while Elizabeth was still in life. We know that Ben Jonson, in the reign of King James, brought the piece with additional pomp again on the stage, and took the liberty of making several changes and additions. Without doubt, the prophecy respecting James the First is due to Ben Jonson: it would only have displeased Elizabeth, and is so ill introduced that we at once recognize in it a foreign interpolation.

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APPENDIX

RESPECTING THE PIECES SAID TO BE FALSELY ATTRIBUTED TO SHAKSPEARE.

THE commentators of Shakspeare, in their attempts to deprive him of parts of his works, or even of whole pieces, have for the most part displayed very little of the true critical spirit. Pope, as is well known, was strongly disposed to declare whole scenes for interpolations of the players; but his opinions were not much listened to. However, Steevens still accedes to the opinion of Pope, respecting the apparition of the ghosts and of Jupiter in *Cymbeline*, while Posthumus is sleeping in the dungeon. But Posthumus finds on waking, a tablet on his breast, with a prophecy on which the *denouement* of the piece depends. Is it to be imagined that Shakspeare would require of his spectators the belief in a wonder without a visible cause? Is Posthumus to dream this tablet with the prophecy? But the gentlemen do not descend to this objection. The verses which the apparitions deliver do not appear to them to be good enough to be Shakspeare's. I imagine I can discover why the poet has not given them more of the splendour of diction. They are the aged parents and brothers of Posthumus, who, from concern for his fate, return from the world below: they ought consequently to speak the language of a more simple olden time, and their voices ought also to appear as a feeble sound of wailing, when contrasted with the thundering oracular language of Jupiter. For this reason Shakspeare chose a syllabic measure which was very common before his time, but which was then getting out of fashion, though it still continued to be frequently used especially in translations of classical poets. In some such manner might the shades express themselves in the then existing translations of Homer and Virgil. The speech of Jupiter is on the other hand majestic, and in form and style bears a complete resemblance to the sonnets of Shakspeare. Nothing but the incapacity of appreciating the views of the poet, and the perspective observed by him, could lead them to stumble at this passage.

Pope would willingly have declared the *Winter's Tale* spu-

rious, one of the noblest creations of the equally bold and lovely fancy of Shakspeare. Why? I should suppose on account of the ship landing in Bohemia, and the chasm of sixteen years between the third and fourth acts, which Time as a prologue entreats us to overleap.

The Three Parts of Henry the Sixth are now at length admitted to be Shakspeare's. Theobald, Warburton, and lastly Farmer, affirmed that they were not Shakspeare's. In this case, we might well ask them to point out the other works of the unknown author, who was capable of inventing the noble death-scenes of Talbot, Suffolk, Beaufort, and York, and so many other scenes. The assertion is so ridiculous, that in this case *Richard the Third* might also not be Shakspeare's, as it is linked in the most immediate manner to the three other pieces, both by the subject, and the spirit and manner of handling.

All the editors, with the exception of Capell, are unanimous in rejecting *Titus Andronicus* as unworthy of Shakspeare, though they always allow it to be printed with the other pieces, as the scape-goat, as it were, of their abusive criticism. The correct method in such an investigation is first to examine into the external grounds, evidences, &c., and to weigh their worth; and then to adduce the internal reasons derived from the quality of the work. The critics of Shakspeare follow a course directly the reverse of this; they set out with a preconceived opinion against a piece, and seek, in justification of this opinion, to render the historical grounds suspicious, and to set them aside. *Titus Andronicus*, is to be found in the first folio edition of Shakspeare's works, which it is known was conducted by Heming and Condell, for many years his friends and fellow-managers of the same theatre. Is it possible to persuade ourselves that they would not have known if a piece in their repertory did or did not actually belong to Shakspeare? And are we to lay to the charge of these honourable men a designed fraud in this single case, when we know that they did not show themselves so very desirous of scraping everything together which went by the name of Shakspeare, but, as it appears, merely gave those plays of which they had manuscripts in hand? Yet the following circumstance is still stronger. George Meres, a contemporary and admirer of Shakspeare, mentions *Titus Andronicus* in an enumeration of his works, in the year 1598. Meres was personally acquainted with the poet, and so very intimately, that the latter read over to him his sonnets before they were printed. I cannot conceive that all the critical scepticism in the world would be sufficient to get over such a testimony.

This tragedy, it is true, is framed according to a false idea of

the tragic, which by an accumulation of cruelties and enormities, degenerates into the horrible and yet leaves no deep impression behind: the story of Tereus and Philomela is heightened and overcharged under other names, and mixed up with the repast of Atreus and Thyeste, and many other incidents. In detail there is no want of beautiful lines, bold images, nay, even features which betray the peculiar conception of Shakspeare. Among these we may reckon the joy of the treacherous Moor at the blackness and ugliness of his child begot in adultery; and in the compassion of *Titus Andronicus*, grown childish through grief, for a fly which had been struck dead, and his rage afterwards when he imagines he discovers in it his black enemy, we recognize the future poet of *Lear*. Are the critics afraid that Shakspeare's fame would be injured, were it established that in his early youth he ushered into the world a feeble and immature work? Was Rome the less the conqueror of the world, because Remus could leap over its first walls? Let any one place himself in Shakspeare's situation at the commencement of his career. He found only a few indifferent models, and yet these met with the most favourable reception, because men are never difficult to please in the novelty of an art before their taste has become fastidious from choice and abundance. Must not this situation have had its influence on him before he learned to make higher demands on himself, and by digging deeper in his own mind, discovered the richest veins of a noble metal? It is even highly probable that he must have made several failures before getting into the right path. Genius is in a certain sense infallible, and has nothing to learn; but art is to be learned, and must be acquired by practice and experience. In Shakspeare's acknowledged works we find hardly any traces of his apprenticeship, and yet an apprenticeship he certainly had. This every artist must have, and especially in a period where he has not before him the example of a school already formed. I consider it as extremely probable, that Shakspeare began to write for the theatre at a much earlier period than the one which is generally stated, namely, not till after the year 1590. It appears that, as early as the year 1584, when only 20 years of age, he had left his paternal home and repaired to London. Can we imagine that such an active head would remain idle for six whole years without making any attempt to emerge by his talents from an uncongenial situation? That in the dedication of the poem of *Venus and Adonis* he calls it "the first heir of his invention," proves nothing against the supposition. It was the first which he printed; he might have composed it at an early period; perhaps, also, he did not include theatrical labours, as they then possessed but little literary dig-

nity. The earlier Shakspeare began to compose for the theatre, the less are we enabled to consider the immaturity and imperfection of a work as a proof of its spuriousness in opposition to historical evidence, if we only find in it prominent features of his mind. Several of the works rejected as spurious, may still have been produced in the period betwixt *Titus Andronicus*, and the earliest of the acknowledged pieces.

At last, Steevens published seven pieces ascribed to Shakspeare in two supplementary volumes. It is to be remarked, that they all appeared in print in Shakspeare's life-time, with his name prefixed at full length. They are the following:—

1. *Lochrine*. The proofs of the genuineness of this piece are not altogether unambiguous; the grounds for doubt, on the other hand, are entitled to attention. However, this question is immediately connected with that respecting *Titus Andronicus*, and must be at the same time resolved in the affirmative or negative.

2. *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*. This piece was acknowledged by Dryden, but as a youthful work of Shakspeare. It is most undoubtedly his, and it has been admitted into several of the late editions. The supposed imperfections originate in the circumstance, that Shakspeare here handled a childish and extravagant romance of the old poet Gower, and was unwilling to drag the subject out of its proper sphere. Hence he even introduces Gower himself, and makes him deliver a prologue entirely in his antiquated language and versification. This power of assuming so foreign a manner is at least no proof of helplessness.

3. *The London Prodigal*. If we are not mistaken, Lessing pronounced this piece to be Shakspeare's, and wished to bring it on the German stage.

4. *The Puritan, or the Widow of Watling-street*. One of my literary friends, intimately acquainted with Shakspeare, was of opinion that the poet must have wished to write a play for once in the style of Ben Jonson, and that in this way we must account for the difference between the present piece and his usual manner. To follow out this idea however would lead to a very nice critical investigation.

5. *Thomas Lord Cromwell*.

6. *Sir John Oldcastle—First Part*.

7. *A Yorkshire Tragedy*.

The three last pieces are not only unquestionably Shakspeare's, but in my opinion they deserve to be classed among his best and maturest works.—Steevens admits at last, in some degree, that they are Shakspeare's as well as the others, excepting *Lochrine*, but he speaks of all of them with great contempt, as quite

worthless productions. His condemnatory sentence is not however in the slightest degree convincing, nor is it supported by critical acumen. I should like to see how such a critic would, of his own natural suggestion, have decided on Shakspeare's acknowledged master-pieces, and what he would have thought of praising in them, had the public opinion not imposed on him the duty of admiration. *Thomas Lord Cromwell* and *Sir John Oldcastle* are biographical dramas, and models in this species: the first is linked, from its subject, to *Henry the Eighth* and the second to *Henry the Fifth*. The second part of *Oldcastle* is wanting; I know not whether a copy of the old edition has been discovered in England, or whether it is lost. *The Yorkshire Tragedy* is a tragedy in one act, a dramatized tale of murder: the tragical effect is overpowering, and it is extremely important to see how poetically Shakspeare could handle such a subject.

There have been still farther ascribed to him: 1st. *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*, a comedy in one act, printed in Dodsley's old plays. This has certainly some appearances in its favour. It contains a merry landlord, who bears a great similarity to the one in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*. However, at all events, though an ingenious, it is but a hasty sketch. 2d. *The Accusation of Paris*. 3d. *The Birth of Merlin*. 4th. *Edward the Third*. 5th. *The Fair Emma*. 6th. *Mucedorus*. 7th. *Arden of Feversham*. I have never seen any of these, and cannot therefore say anything respecting them. From the passages cited, I am led to conjecture that the subject of *Mucedorus* is the popular story of Valentine and Orson: a beautiful subject which Lope de Vega has also taken for a play. *Arden of Feversham* is said to be a tragedy on the story of a man, from whom the poet descended by the mother's side. If the quality of the piece is not too directly at variance with this claim, the circumstance would afford an additional probability in its favour. For such motives were not foreign to Shakspeare: he treated Henry the Seventh, who bestowed lands on his forefathers for services performed by them, with a visible partiality.

Of Shakspeare's share in *The two Noble Cousins* it will be the time to speak when I come to mention Fletcher's works.

It would be very instructive, if it could be proved that several earlier attempts of works, afterwards re-written, proceeded from himself, and not from an unknown author. We should thus be best enabled to trace his developement as an artist. Of the older *King John*, in two parts (printed by Steevens among six old plays), this might probably be made out. That he sometimes came back to the same is certain. We know with respect to

Hamlet, for instance, that it was very gradually formed by him to its present perfect state.

Whoever takes from Shakspeare a play earlier ascribed to him, and confessedly belonging to his time, is unquestionably bound to answer, with some degree of probability, this question: who has then written it? Shakspeare's competitors in the dramatic walk are pretty well known, and if those of them who have even acquired a considerable name, a Lilly, a Marlow, a Heywood, are still so very far below him, we can hardly imagine that the author of a work, which rises so high beyond theirs, would have remained unknown.

LECTURE XIII.

Two periods of the English theatre;—the first the most important.—The first conformation of the stage, and its advantages.—State of the histrionic art in Shakspeare's time.—Antiquities of dramatic literature.—Lilly, Marlow, Heywood.—Ben Jonson.—Criticism of his works.—Masks.—Beaumont and Fletcher.—General characterization of these poets, and remarks on some of their pieces.—Massinger and other contemporaries of Charles the First.—Closing of the stage by the Puritans.—Revival of the stage under Charles the Second.—Depravity of taste and morals.—Dryden, Otway, and others.—Characterization of the comic poets from Wycherley and Congreve to the middle of the eighteenth century.—Tragedies of the same period.—Rowe.—Addison's Cato.—Later pieces.—Familiar tragedy: Lillo.—Garrick.—Latest state.

THE great master of whom we have spoken in the preceding Lecture forms such a singular exception to the whole history of art, that we are compelled to assign a particular place to him. He owed hardly anything to his predecessors, and he has had the greatest influence on his successors: but no man has yet learned from him his secret. For two whole centuries, during which his countrymen have diligently employed themselves in the cultivation of every branch of science and art, by their own confession, he has not only never yet been surpassed, but he has left every dramatic poet at a greater distance behind him.

In a sketch of the history of the English theatre which I am now to give, I shall be frequently obliged to return to Shakspeare. The dramatic literature of the English is very rich; they can boast of a considerable number of dramatic poets, who possessed in a distinguished degree the talent of original characterization, and the means of theatrical effect. Their hands were not shackled by prejudices, by arbitrary rules, and by the anxious observance of conveniences. There has never been in England an academical court of taste; in art as in life, every man decides for what pleases him best, or what is most suitable to his nature. Notwithstanding this liberty, their writers have not however been able to escape the influence of varying modes, and of the spirit of different ages.

We remain true to our principle of merely dwelling at length on what we consider as the highest efforts of poetry, and of taking brief views of all that merely occupies the second or third place.

The antiquities of the English theatre have been sufficiently cleared up by the English writers, and especially by Malone.

The earliest dramatic attempts were here as well as elsewhere mysteries and moralities. Still however it would seem that the English distinguished themselves at an earlier period in these productions than other nations. It has been recorded in the History of the Council of Constance, that the English prelates, in one of the intervals between the sittings, entertained their other brethren with a spiritual play in Latin, such as the latter were either entirely unacquainted with, or at least not in such perfection, (according to the simple ideas of art of those times). The beginning of a theatre, properly so called, cannot however be placed farther back than the reign of Elizabeth. *John Heywood*, the buffoon of Henry the Eighth, is considered as the oldest comic writer: the single *Interlude* under his name, published in Dodsley's collection, is in fact merely a dialogue and not a drama. But *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, which was first acted about the year 1560, certainly deserves the name of a comedy. However antiquated in language and versification, it possesses unequivocal merit in the low comic. The whole plot turns on a lost needle, the finding of which is pursued with the utmost assiduity: the poverty of the persons of the drama, which this supposes, and the whole of their domestic condition, is very amusingly portrayed, and the part of a cunning beggar especially is drawn with much humour. The coarse comic of this piece bears a resemblance to that of the *Avocat Patelin*; yet the English play has not, like the French, been honoured with a revival on the stage in a new shape.

The history of the English theatre divides itself naturally into two periods. The first begins nearly about the time of the ascension of Elizabeth, and extends to about the end of the reign of Charles the First, when the Puritans gained the ascendancy, and effected the prohibition of all plays of whatsoever description. The shutting up of the theatres lasted thirteen years; and they were not again opened till the restoration of Charles the Second. This interruption, the change which had taken place in the mean time on the general way of thinking and in manners, and lastly, the influence of the French literature which was then flourishing, gave quite a different character to the plays written afterwards. The works of the older school were indeed in part sought out, but the school itself was extinguished. I call the dramatical poets of the first epoch a school, in the sense in which it is taken in art, as with all their personal diversities we may still perceive on the whole a common direction in their productions. Independently also of the language or contemporary allusions, we should never be disposed to take a play of that school, though ignorant of its author, and the time when it was produced, for a production of

the more modern period. The latter is susceptible of many subdivisions, but these may also be dispensed with. The talents of the authors, and the taste of the public, have fluctuated in all manner of directions, sometimes the most opposite, foreign influence has gained more and more the ascendancy, and, to express myself without circumlocution, the English theatre has in its progress become more and more destitute of character and independence. For a critic who seeks everywhere for originality, and who troubles himself much less about what has arisen from imitation, or the avoiding of imitation, the dramatic poets of the first period are by far the most important, although with the exception of Shakspeare they may be reproached with great defects and extravagances, and although many of the moderns are distinguished for a more careful polish.

There are periods when the human mind makes all at once gigantic strides in an art previously almost unknown, as if during its long sleep it had been collecting strength for such an effort. The age of Elizabeth was in England such an epoch for dramatic poetry. This Queen, during her long reign witnessed the first infantine attempts of the English theatre, and its most masterly productions. Shakspeare had a lively feeling of this general and rapid developement of qualities, not before called into exercise; in one of his sonnets he calls his age, *these time bettering days*. The predilections for the theatre prevailed to such a degree, that in a period of sixty years, under this and the following reign, seventeen play houses were built or fitted up in London, whereas the capital of the present day with twice the population* is satisfied with two. No doubt they did not act every day, and several of these theatres were very small, and probably not much better fitted up than Marionette booths. Still however they served to call forth the fertility of those writers who possessed or supposed that they possessed, dramatic talents; for every theatre must have had its peculiar repertory, as the pieces were either not printed at all, or at least not till long after their composition, and as a single theatrical company was in the exclusive possession of the manuscript. However many feeble and lame productions might have, in this manner, been called forth, it was however impossible that such an extensive competition should not have been advantageous. Of all the different species of poetry the dramatic is the only one in which experience is necessary: and the failure of others is, for the man of talents, an experiment at their expense. Moreover, the exercise of this art requires vigorous determination, to which the great artist is often the least inclined, as in the execution he

* The author might almost have said six times.—TRANS.

finds the greatest difficulty in satisfying himself; while, on the other hand, his greatest enjoyment consists in embodying in his mind the beloved creation of his imagination. It is therefore fortunate for him when the importunity of those who, with trifling means, venture on this difficult career stimulates him to put fresh hand to the work. It is of importance to the dramatic poet to be connected immediately with the stage, that he may either himself guide it, or learn to accommodate himself to its wants; and the dramatic poets of that day were, for the most part, also players. The theatre still made small claims to literature, and it thus escaped the pedantry of scholastic learning. There were as yet no periodical writings which, as the instrument of cabal, could mislead opinion. Of jealousy and bickerings among the authors there was no want; this however was more a source of amusement than of displeasure to the public, who decided without prejudice or partiality according to the mass of its entertainment. The poets and players, as well as the spectators, possessed in general the most essential requisite of success: a true love for the business. This was the more unquestionable, as the theatrical art was not then surrounded with all those foreign ornaments and inventions of luxury, which serve to distract the attention and corrupt the sense, but made its appearance in the most modest, and we may well say in the most humble shape. For the admirers of Shakespeare it must be an object of curiosity to know what was the appearance of the theatre in which his works were first performed. We have an engraving of the play-house of which he was manager, and which, from the symbol of a Hercules supplying the place of Atlas, was called the globe: it is a massive structure destitute of architectural ornaments, and almost without windows in the outward walls. The pit was open to the sky, and they acted by daylight; the scene had no other decoration than wrought tapestry, which hung at some distance from the walls, and left room for several entrances. In the back-ground there was a stage raised above the first, a sort of balcony, which served for various purposes, and was obliged to signify all manner of things according to circumstances. The players appeared, excepting on a few rare occasions, in the dress of their time, or at most distinguished by higher feathers on their hats and roses on their shoes. The chief means of disguise were false hair and beards, and occasionally even masks. The female parts were played by boys so long as their voice allowed them. Two companies of actors in London consisted even entirely of boys, namely the choir of the Queen's Chapel, and of St. Paul's. Betwixt the acts it was not customary to have music, but in the pieces themselves marches, dances, solo

songs, and the like, were introduced on proper occasions, and trumpet flourishes at the entrance of great personages. In the more early time it was usual to represent the action before it was spoken, in silent pantomime (*dumb show*) between each act allegorically or even without any disguise, to give a definite direction to the expectation. Shakspeare has still observed this practice in the play of *Hamlet*.

From the outlay in all theatrical accessories:—the architecture of the theatre, lighting, music, the illusion of decorations changing in a moment as if by enchantment, machinery and costume; we are now so completely spoiled that this meager and confined mode of stage decoration will in no manner satisfy us. Many things however might perhaps be urged in favour of such a constitution of the theatre. Where they are not enticed by any splendid accessories, the spectators will be the more difficult to please in the main thing, namely, the excellence of the dramatic composition, and its vivification by delivery and action. When perfection is not attainable in external decoration, the critic will rather altogether overlook it than allow himself to be disturbed by its defectiveness and want of taste. And how seldom has perfection been here attained! It is about a century and a half since attention began to be paid to the observation of costume on the European theatres; what has been performed in this way has always appeared excellent to the multitude, and yet from the engravings which sometimes accompany the printed plays, and from every evidence, we may easily convince ourselves that it was always characterized by puerility and mannerism, and that in all the endeavours to assume a foreign or antique appearance, they never could shake themselves free of the fashions of their own time. A sort of hoop was long considered as an indispensable appendage of a hero; the long peruques and *fontanges*, or top-knots, kept their ground in heroical tragedy as long as in real life; afterwards it would have been considered as barbarous to appear without powdered and frizzled hair; on this was placed a helmet with variegated feathers; a taffeta scarf fluttered over the gilt paper coat of mail; and the Achilles or Alexander was then completely mounted. We have now at last returned to a purer taste, and in some great theatres the costume is actually observed in a learned and severe style. We owe this principally to the antiquarian reform in the plastic arts, and the approximation of the female dress to the Grecian; for the actresses were always the most inveterate in retaining on the stage those fashions by which they turned their charms to account in society. However, even yet there are very few players who know how to wear a

Grecian purple mantle, or a toga, in a natural and becoming manner; and who, in moments of passion, do not seem to be unduly occupied with holding and tossing about their drapery.

Our system of decoration was properly invented for the opera, to which it is also in reality best adapted. It has several inevitable defects; others which certainly may be avoided, but which seldom are avoided. Among the inevitable defects I reckon the breaking of the lines in the side scenes from every point of view except one, the disproportion between the size of the player when he appears in the back-ground and the objects as diminished in the perspective; the unfavourable lighting from below and behind; the contrast between the painted and the actual lights and shades; the impossibility of narrowing the stage at pleasure so that the inside of a palace and a hut have the same length and breadth, &c. The errors which may be avoided are, want of simplicity and of great and reposing masses; overloading the scenery with superfluous and distracting objects, either from the painter being desirous of showing his strength in perspective, or not knowing how to fill up the space otherwise; an architecture full of mannerism often altogether unconcerted, nay, even at variance with possibility, coloured in a motley manner which resembles no species of stone in the world. The most of the scene-painters owe their success entirely to the ignorance of the spectators in the plastic arts: I have often seen a whole pit enchanted with a decoration from which every intelligent eye must have turned away with disgust, and in place of which a plain green wall would have been infinitely better. From the vitiated taste in respect to the splendour of decorations and magnificence of the dresses, the arrangement of the theatre has become a complicated and expensive business, whence it frequently happens that the main requisites, good pieces and good players, are considered as secondary matters; but this is an inconvenience which it is here unnecessary to mention.

Although the earlier English stage had properly no decorations, we must allow however that it was not altogether destitute of machinery: without it, it is almost impossible to conceive how several pieces, for instance, *Mucbeth*, *The Tempest*, and others, could ever be represented. The celebrated architect Inigo Jones, who lived in the reign of James the First, put in motion, very complicated and artificial machines for the decoration of the masks of Ben Jonson which were acted at court.

In the Spanish theatre at the time of its formation, as well as in the English, the same circumstance took place, namely, that when the stage remained a moment empty, and other persons came in by another entrance, a change of scene was supposed though none

was visible; and this circumstance had the most favourable influence on the form of the dramas. The poet was not obliged to consult the scene-painter to know what could or what could not be represented; not to calculate whether the store of decorations on hand were sufficient, or new ones would be requisite. He imposed no constraint on the action with respect to change of times and places, but represented it entirely as it would have naturally taken place;* he left to the imagination to fill up the intervals agreeably to the speeches, and to conceive all the surrounding circumstances.—This call on the fancy to supply the deficiencies supposes, indeed, not merely benevolent, but also intelligent spectators in a poetical tone of mind. That is the true illusion, when the spectators are so completely carried away by the impressions of the poetry and the acting, that they overlook the secondary matters, and forget the whole of the remaining objects around them. The lying censoriously on the watch to discover whether any circumstance may not violate an apparent reality which, strictly speaking, never can be attained, is a proof of inertness of imagination and an incapacity to be deceived. This prosaical incredulity may be carried so far as to render it utterly impossible for the theatrical artists, who in every constitution of the theatre require many indulgencies, to amuse the spectators by their productions; and in this manner they are, in the end, the enemies of their own enjoyment.

We now complain, and with justice, that in Shakspeare's pieces the too frequent change of scenes occasions an interruption. But the poet is here perfectly blameless. It ought to be known that the English plays of that time, as well as the Spanish, were printed without any mention of the scene and its changes. In Shakspeare the modern editors have inserted the scenical directions; and in doing so they have proceeded with the most pedantic accuracy. Whoever has the management of the representation of a piece of Shakspeare's may, without any hesitation, at once strike out all the changes of scene of the following description:—"Another room, in the palace, another street, another part of the field of battle," &c.—By these means alone, in most cases, the change of decorations will be reduced to a very moderate number.

Of the art of the actors on a theatre which possessed so little external splendour as the old English, those who are in the habit

* Capell, an intelligent commentator on Shakspeare, unjustly under-rated by the others, has placed the advantage in this respect in the clearest light, in an observation on *Antony and Cleopatra*. It emboldened the poet, when the truth of the action required it, to plan scenes which the most skilful mechanist and scene-painter could scarcely exhibit to the eye; as for instance, in a Spanish play where sea-fights occur.

of judging of the man from his dress will not be inclined to entertain a very favourable idea. I am induced, however, from this very circumstance, to draw quite a contrary conclusion: the want of attractions of an accessory nature renders it the more necessary to be careful in essentials. Several Englishmen* have given it as their opinion, that the players of the first epoch were in all likelihood greatly superior to those of the second, at least with the exception of Garrick; and if we had no other proofs, the quality of the pieces of Shakspeare renders this extremely probable. That most of his principal characters require a great player is self-evident; the elevated and compressed style of his poetry cannot be understood without the most energetic and flexible delivery; he often supposes between the speeches a mute action of great difficulty, for which he gives no directions. A poet who labours only and immediately for the stage will not rely for his main effect on traits which he must beforehand know will be lost in the representation from the unskilfulness of his interpreters. Shakspeare must have therefore purposely lowered the tone of his dramatic art, if he had not possessed excellent theatrical assistants. The name and fame of some of them have descended even to our times. As we are not fond of allowing any one man to possess two great talents in an equal degree, it has been assumed on very questionable grounds,† that Shakspeare was himself but an indifferent actor.‡ The instructions of Hamlet to the players prove at least that he was an excellent judge of acting. We know that correctness of conception and judgment are not always coupled with the means of execution; Shakspeare, however, possessed a very important and too frequently neglected requisite for serious acting, a beautiful and noble countenance. Neither is it probable that he could

* See a Dialogue prefixed to the 11th volume of Dodsley's *Old Plays*.

† No certain account has yet been obtained of any principal part played by Shakspeare in his own pieces. In *Hamlet* he played the Ghost: certainly a very important part, if we consider that from the failure in it the whole piece runs a risk of appearing ridiculous. A writer of his time says in a satirical pamphlet, that the Ghost whined in a pitiful manner; and it has been concluded from this that Shakspeare was a bad player. What logic! On the restoration of the theatre under Charles the Second, they were desirous of collecting traditions and information respecting the former period. Lowin, the original Hamlet, instructed Betterton as to the proper conception of the character. There was still alive a brother of Shakspeare, a decrepid old man, who had never had any literary cultivation, and whose memory was impaired by age. From him they could extract nothing, but that he had sometimes visited his brother in town, and once saw him play an old man with grey hair and beard. From the above description, it was concluded, that this must have been the faithful servant Adam in *As You Like It*; also a second-rate part. In most of Shakspeare's pieces we have not the slightest knowledge of the manner in which the parts were distributed. In two of Ben Jonson's pieces we see Shakspeare's name among the principal actors.

have been manager of the most respectable theatre, had he not himself possessed the talent of acting and guiding the action of others. Ben Jonson, though a meritorious poet, could not even obtain the situation of a player, as he did not possess the requisite qualifications. From the passage cited in *Hamlet*, from the burlesque tragedy of the mechanics in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and many other passages, it is evident that there was then an inundation of bad players, who fell into all the aberrations from propriety with which at the present day we are offended; but the public, it would appear, knew well how to distinguish, and could not be easily satisfied.*

A thorough critical knowledge of the antiquities of the English theatre can only be obtained in England: the old editions of the pieces which belong to the earlier period are even there extremely rare, and in foreign libraries they are never to be met with; the modern collectors have merely been able to give a few specimens, and not the whole store. It would be highly important to see together all the plays which were undoubtedly in existence before Shakspeare entered on his career, that we might be able to decide with certainty how much of the dramatic art it was possible for him to have learned from others. The year of the appearance of a piece on the stage is generally, however, difficult to ascertain, as it was often not printed till long afterwards. If in the labours of the contemporaries of Shakspeare, even the older who continued to write at the same time with himself, we can discover the resemblance of his style and traces of his art, still it will always remain doubtful whether we are to consider these as the feeble model, or the imperfect imitation. Shakspeare appears to have had all the flexibility of mind, and all the modesty, of Raphael, who, also, without ever being an imitator and becoming unfaithful to his sublime and tranquil genius, applied all the advances of his competitors to his own advantage.

A few feeble attempts to introduce the form of the antique tragedy with chorusses, &c. were made at an early period, and praised without producing any effect. They show, like most of the attempts of the moderns in this way, the singular spectacles through which the old poets were viewed; for it is hardly to be conceived how unlike they are to the Greek tragedies, not merely in worth,

* In this respect, the following simile in *Richard the Third* is deserving of attention:—

As in a theatre the eyes of men,
After a well-graced actor leaves the stage,
Are idly bent on him that enters next,
Thinking his prattle to be tedious, &c.

for that we may easily suppose, but even in those external circumstances which may be the most easily laid hold of. *Ferrex and Porrex, or the tragedy of Gorboduc*, is most frequently cited, which was the production of a lord, in the first part of the reign of Elizabeth. Pope bestows high praise on this piece, on account of its regularity, and laments that the contemporary poets did not follow in the same track; for thus he thought a classical theatre would have been formed in England. This opinion only proves that Pope, who however passes for a perfect judge of poetry, had not even an idea of the first elements of the dramatic art. Nothing can be more spiritless and inanimate, nor more drawling and monotonous in the tone of the language and in the versification, than this *Ferrex and Porrex*; and although the unities of place and time are in no manner observed, and a number of events are crowded into it, yet the scene is wholly destitute of movement: all that happens is previously announced in endless consultations, and afterwards stated in equally endless narratives. *Mustapha*, another unsuccessful work of a kindred description, and also by a great lord, is a tedious web of all sorts of political subtleties; the chorusses in particular are true treatises. However, of the innumerable maxims in rhyme, there are many which might well have a place in the later pieces of Corneille. Kyd, one of the predecessors of Ben Jonson, and named by him in terms of praise, handled the *Cornelia* of Garnier. This may be called receiving an imitation of the ancients from the third or fourth hand.

The first serious piece calculated for popular effect is the *Spanish Tragedy*, so called from the scene of the story, and not from its being borrowed from a Spanish writer. It kept possession of the stage for a tolerable length of time, though it was often the subject of the ridicule and the parodies of the succeeding poets. It usually happens that the public do not easily return from a predilection entertained by them in their first warm susceptibility for the impressions of an art yet unknown to them, even after they have long been acquainted with better, nay, with excellent works. This piece is certainly full of puerilities; the author has ventured on the picture of violent situations and passions without suspecting his own inability; the catastrophe more especially, which in horror is intended to outstrip everything conceivable, is introduced in a silly manner, and produces merely a ludicrous effect. The whole is like the drawings of children, without any observation of proportions, and without steadiness of hand. With a great deal of bombast, the tone of the dialogue, however, has something natural, nay, even familiar, and in the change of scenes we perceive a light movement,

which in some degree will account for the general applause received by this immature production.

Lilly and Marlow deserve to be noticed among the predecessors of Shakspeare. Lilly was a scholar, and laboured to introduce a stilted elegance in English prose, and in the tone of dialogue, with such success, that for a period he was the fashionable writer, and the court ladies even formed their conversation after the model of his book *Euphæ*. His comedy in prose, *Campaspe*, is a warning example of the impossibility of ever constructing, from anecdotes and epigrammatic sallies, anything like a dramatic whole. The author was a learned witling, but in no respect a poet.

Marlow possessed more real talent, and was in a better way. He has handled the history of *Edward the Second* in a very artless manner it is true, but with a certain truth and simplicity, so that many scenes do not fail to produce a pathetic effect. His verses are flowing, but without energy; how Ben Jonson could come to use the expression, *Marlow's mighty line*, is more than I can conceive. Shakspeare could neither learn nor derive anything from the luscious manner of Lilly; but in Marlow's *Edward the Second*, I certainly imagine that I can discover the feebleness of the earliest historical pieces of Shakspeare.

Of the old comedies in Dodsley's collection, *the Pinner of Wakefelde*, and *Grim, the Collier of Croydon*, seem alone to belong to a period before Shakspeare. Both are not without merit, in the manner of Marionette pieces: in the first, a popular tradition; and in the second, a merry legend is handled with hearty joviality.

I have dwelt longer on the beginnings of the English theatre, than from their internal worth they deserve, because it has been affirmed recently in England, that Shakspeare shows more affinity to the works of his contemporaries now sunk in oblivion, than people have hitherto been usually disposed to believe. We are as little to wonder at certain outward resemblances, as at the similarity of the dresses in portraits of the same period. In a more limited sense, however, we apply the word resemblance only to the relation of those features which express the spirit and the mind. Moreover, plays can only be admitted as a satisfactory proof of such an affirmation, which are ascertained to have been written before the commencement of Shakspeare's career; for in the works of his younger contemporaries, a Decker, Marston, Webster, and others, something of a resemblance may be very naturally accounted for; the traces of the imitation of Shakspeare are sufficiently distinct. That imitation was, however, merely confined to external appearance and separate peculiarities; these

writers, without the virtues of their model, possess in reality all the faults which senseless critics have falsely censured in Shakspeare.

A sentence somewhat more favourable is merited by Chapman, the Translator of Homer, and Thomas Heywood, judging of them from the single specimens in Dodsley's collection. Chapman has handled the well known story of the Ephesian Matron, under the title of *the Widow's Tears*, not without comic talent. Heywood's *Woman killed with Kindness* is a familiar tragedy: so early may we find examples of this species, which has been given out for new. It is the story of a wife tenderly beloved by her husband, and seduced by a man whom he had loaded with benefits; her error is discovered, and the severest determination which her husband can bring himself to form is, to remove her from him without proclaiming her dishonour: she grieves herself to death from repentance. A due gradation is not observed in the seduction, but the last scenes are truly agitating. A distinct pronounciation of a moral aim is, perhaps, essential to the familiar tragedy; or rather, by means of such an aim, a picture of human destinies, whether relating to kings or private families, is drawn down from the ideal sphere into the prosaic world. But when once we admit the title of this subordinate species, we shall find that the demands of morality and the dramatic art coincide, and that the utmost severity of moral principles leads again to poetical elevation. The aspect of that false repentance which merely seeks exemption from punishment is painful; repentance, as the pain arising from the irreparable forfeiture of innocence, is susceptible of a truly tragic portraiture. Let there be given to the above piece a happy conclusion, such a one as in the present day, notwithstanding this painful feeling, has obtained such general applause in a well known play:* namely, the reconciliation of the husband and wife, not on the death-bed of the repentant sinner, but in sound mind and body, and the renewal of the marriage; and it will then be found that it has not merely lost its moral, but also its poetical impression.

In other respects, this piece of Heywood is very inartificial and carelessly finished: instead of duly developing the main action, the author distracts our attention by a second intrigue, which can hardly be said to have the slightest connexion with the other. At this we need hardly be astonished, for Heywood was both player and an excessively prolific author. Two hundred and twenty pieces were, he says, written entirely or for the

* The author alludes to Kotzebue's play of *Menschenhass und Reue* (The Stranger).—TRANS.

greatest part, by himself; and he was so careless respecting these productions, which were probably completed by him without any great labour, that he had lost the manuscripts of the most of them, and only twenty-five remained for publication by means of the press.

All the above authors, and many others besides, whatever applause they obtained in their life-time, have been unsuccessful in transmitting a living memorial of their works to posterity. Of Shakspeare's younger contemporaries and competitors, few have attained this distinction; chiefly Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Massinger.

Ben Jonson found in Shakspeare a ready encourager of his talents. His first piece, imperfect in many respects, *Every Man in his Humour*, was by Shakspeare's intervention brought on the stage; *Sejanus* was even touched by him, and in both he undertook a principal character. This hospitable reception on the part of that great man, who was far above everything like jealousy and petty rivalry, met with a very ungrateful return. Jonson assumed a superiority over Shakspeare on account of his school learning, the only point in which he really had the advantage; he introduced all sorts of biting allusions in his pieces and prologues, and reprobated more especially those magical flights of fancy, the peculiar heritage of Shakspeare, as contrary to genuine taste. In justification of him we must remark, that he was not born under a happy star: his pieces were either altogether unsuccessful, or they obtained but a small share of applause compared with the astonishing popularity of Shakspeare; moreover, he was incessantly attacked by his rivals with all manner of satires, on the theatre and elsewhere, as a disagreeable pedant, who pretended to know everything better than themselves:—all this rendered him atrabilarious in the extreme. He possessed in reality a very solid understanding; he was conscious that in the exercise of his art he displayed zeal and seriousness: that nature had denied him grace, a property which no effort can give, he could not indeed suspect. He thought every man may boast of his assiduity, as Lessing says on a similar occasion. After several failures on the stage, he formed the resolution of declaring in the outset of his pieces that they were good, and that if they should not please, this could only proceed from the senselessness of the multitude. The epigraph of one of his unfortunate pieces which he committed to the press is highly amusing: "As it was never acted, but most negligently played by some, the King's servants, and more squeamishly beheld and censured by others, the King's subjects."

Jonson was a critical poet in the good and bad sense of the word. He endeavoured to form an exact estimate of what he had on every occasion to perform; hence he succeeded best in

that species where the understanding comes in for the greatest share, and imagination and feeling are merely subordinate,—the comedy of character. He introduced nothing into his works which critical dissection could not again extract, as his confidence was such in it, that he conceived it exhausted everything which pleases and charms us in poetry. He was not aware that, in the chemical retort of the critic, what is most valuable, the fugacious living spirit of a poem, evaporates. His pieces are in general deficient in soul, in that nameless something which always continues to attract and enchant us, for the very reason that it cannot be defined. In the lyrical pieces of his masks, we feel the want of a certain mental music of imagery and intonation, which cannot be produced by the accurate observation of a difficult measure. He is everywhere deficient in those excellencies which flow unsolicited from the pen of the poet; and which no artist, who purposely hunts after them, can ever hope to obtain. We must not quarrel with him, however, for the high opinion which he entertained of his works; for the merit they have he owed altogether to himself, like acquired moral properties. The production of them was attended with labour, and unfortunately it is also a labour to read them. They resemble solid and regular edifices, before which however the clumsy scaffolding has remained, to interrupt and prevent us from viewing the architecture with ease, and receiving from it a harmonious impression.

We have two tragical attempts of Jonson, and a considerable number of comedies and masks.

He could have risen to the dignity of the tragic tone, but he had not the smallest turn for the pathetic. As he incessantly preaches up the imitation of the ancients, and we cannot deny him a learned acquaintance with their works, it is astonishing to observe how much his two tragedies differ, both in substance and form from the Greek tragedy. From this example we may see the influence which the prevailing tone of an age, and the course already pursued in an art, must necessarily have upon even the most independent minds. In the historical extent given by Jonson to his *Sejanus* and *Cataline*, unity of time and place were entirely out of the question; and both pieces are crowded with a multitude of secondary persons, such as we never find in any Greek tragedy. In *Cataline*, the prologue is spoken by the spirit of Scylla, and it bears a good deal of resemblance to that of Tantalus, in the *Atreus and Thyestes* of Seneca; to the end of each act an instructive moralizing chorus is appended, without being duly introduced or connected with the whole. This is the extent of the resemblance to the ancients; in other respects, the form of Shakspeare's historical dramas is adhered to

but without their romantic charm. We cannot with certainty say, whether or not Jonson had the Roman pieces of Shakspeare before him: it is probable that he had in *Cataline* at least; but, at all events, he has not learned from him the art of remaining true to history, and yet satisfying the demands of poetry. In Jonson's hands, the subject continues history without becoming poetry; the political events which he has described have more the appearance of business than action. *Cataline* and *Sejanus* are solid dramatic studies after Sallust and Cicero, after Tacitus, Suetonius, Juvenal, and others; and that is the best we can say of them. In *Cataline*, which upon the whole is preferable to *Sejanus*, he is also censurable for not having blended the dissimilarity of the masses. The first act possesses most elevation, though it disgusts us from its want of moderation: we see a secret assembly of conspirators, and nature appears to answer the furious inspiration of wickedness by dreadful signs. The second act paints the intrigues and loves of depraved women, by which the conspiracy was brought to light, and treads closely on comedy; the last three acts contain a history in dialogue, developed with much good sense, but little poetical elevation. It is to be lamented that Jonson gave only his own text of *Sejanus* without communicating the alterations of Shakspeare. We should have been curious to know the means by which he might have attempted to give animation to the uniformity of the piece without changing its plan, and how far his genius could accommodate itself to foreign purposes.

After these attempts Jonson took his leave of the tragic muse, and in reality his talents were altogether adapted to comedy, and that too merely the comedy of character. His characterization however is better suited to serious satire than playful ridicule; the later Roman satirists, rather than the comic authors, were his models. Nature had denied him that light and easy raillery which plays harmlessly round everything, and which seems to be the mere effusion of gaiety, but which is so much the more philosophic, as it is not the vehicle of any definite doctrine, but merely contains a general irony.—There is more of a spirit of observation than of fancy in the comic inventions of Jonson. Hence his pieces are defective also in point of intrigue. He was a strong advocate for the purity of the species, was unwilling to make use of any romantic motives, and he never had recourse to a novel. But his means of entangling and disentangling his plot are often improbable and constrained, without gaining over the imagination by their attractive boldness. Even where he has contrived a happy plot, he required so much room for the delineation of the characters, that we often lose sight of the intrigue

altogether, and the action moves on with the most heavy pace. He sometimes resembles those too accurate portrait painters, who for the sake of a likeness imagine they must include in the imitation every mark of the small pox, every carbuncle or freckle. He has been frequently suspected of having had real persons in his eye in the delineation of particular characters; he has been at the same time reproached with making his characters merely a personification of general ideas, and although these reproaches seem at variance with each other, they are neither of them however without some foundation. He possessed a methodical head; consequently where he had once conceived a character in its leading idea, he followed it out with the utmost strictness; what merely served to give individual animation, without reference to this leading idea, would have appeared to him in the light of a digression. Hence his names are, for the most part, expressive even to an unpleasant degree of distinctness; and, to add to our satiety, he not unfrequently tacks explanatory descriptions to the dramatis personæ. On the other hand he acted upon this principle—that the comic writer must exhibit to us real life, with a minute and petty diligence. He generally seized the manners of his own nation and age: this was deserving of praise; but he attached himself too much to external peculiarities, to the singularities and affectations of the modish tone which were then called humours, and which from their nature are as transient as dresses. Hence a great part of his comic very soon became obsolete, and as early as the re-opening of the theatre under Charles the Second, no actors could be found who were capable of doing justice to such caricatures. Local colours like these can only be preserved from fading by the most complete seasoning with wit. This is what Shakspeare has effected. Compare, for instance, his Ostrick, in *Hamlet* with Fastidius Brisk in Jonson's *Every Man out of his Humour*: both are portraiture of the insipid affectation of a courtier of that day; but Ostrick, although he speaks his own peculiar language, will remain to the end of time an exact and intelligible image of foppish folly, whereas Fastidius is merely a portrait in a dress no longer in fashion, and nothing more. However, Jonson has not always fallen into this error; his Captain Bobadill, for example, in *Every Man in his Humour*, a beggarly and cowardly adventurer, who passes himself off with young and simple people for a Hector, is, it is true, far from being as amusing and original as Pistol, but he remains also a model in his way, notwithstanding the change of manners, and he has been imitated by English comic writers of aftertimes.

In the piece which I have just named, the first work of Jonson, the action is extremely feeble and insignificant. In the follow-

ing, *Every Man out of his Humour*, he has gone still farther astray, in seeking the comic effect merely in caricatured traits, without any interest of situation: it is a rhapsody of ludicrous scenes without connexion and progress. The *Bartholomew Fair* is also merely a coarse *Bambocciate*, in which we do not remark more connexion than in the hubbub, the noise, the quarreling and thefts, which usually take place on the occasion of such an amusement of the populace. Vulgar delight is too naturally portrayed; the part of the Puritan however is deserving of distinction: his casuistical consultation, whether he ought to eat a sucking pig according to the custom of the fair, and his lecture afterwards against puppet-shows as a heathen idolatry are inimitable, and full of the most powerful comic salt. Ben Jonson did not then foresee that the Puritans, before the lapse of one generation, would be sufficiently powerful to take a very severe revenge on his art, on account of similar raileries.

In so far as the plot is concerned, the greatest praise is merited by *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*, and *Epicæne, or the Silent Woman*. In *Volpone* Jonson for once has entered into Italian manners, but not taken an ideal view of them. The leading idea is admirable, and for the most part executed in a masterly manner: towards the end however the whole turns too much on swindling and villany, which necessarily calls for the interference of criminal justice, and the piece, from the punishment of the guilty, has everything but a merry conclusion. In *The Alchemist* both the deceivers and deceived afford us a fund of entertainment, only the author enters too deeply into alchemistical learning. Of an unintelligible jargon very short specimens ought only to be given in comedy, and it is best that they should have a secondary signification, of which the person who uses the mysterious language is not himself aware; when carried to too great a length, it occasions wearisomeness as well as the writings themselves, which served as a model. In *The Devil's an Ass*, the poet has failed to draw due advantage from a fanciful invention with which he begins, but which indeed was not his own; and our expectation, after being so deceived, remains dissatisfied with other scenes of a good comic description.

Of all the pieces of Jonson, there is hardly one, as it stands, which would please on a theatre in the present day, as the most of them indeed did not please in his own time; but extracts from them could hardly fail to be successful. In general, much might be borrowed from him, and much might be learned both from his merits and defects. His characters are for the most part solidly and judiciously drawn; he merely fails in the art of setting them off by the contrast of situation. He has seldom in this respect

planned his scenes so successfully as in *Every Man in his Humour*, where the jealous merchant is called off to an important business, when his wife is in expectation of a visit of which he is suspicious, and where he is anxious to station his servant as a sentinel without however confiding his secret to him, because above all things he dreads lest his jealousy should be remarked. This scene is a master-piece, and if Jonson had always so composed, we must have been obliged to rank him among the first comic writers.

We merely mention the *masks*, lest we should be charged with an omission: allegorical occasional pieces, chiefly destined for court festivals, and decorated with machinery, masked dresses, dancing, and singing. This secondary species died again nearly with Jonson; the only production of any fame in this way, at an after period, is the *Comus* of Milton. When allegory is confined to mere personification, it must infallibly turn out very frigid in a play; the action itself must be allegorical, and in this respect there are many ingenious inventions, but the Spanish poets have almost alone furnished us with successful examples. The peculiarity of Jonson's masks most deserving of remark seems to me to be the *anti-masks*, as they are called, which the poet himself sometimes attaches to his invention, and generally allows to precede the serious act. As the ideal flatteries, for which the gods have been brought down from Olympus, are but too apt to become luscious, this antidote on such occasions is certainly deserving of commendation.

Ben Jonson, who in all his pieces took a mechanical view of art, bore a farther resemblance to the master of a handicraft in taking an apprentice. He had a servant of the name of *Broome*, who formed himself as a theatrical writer from the conversation and instructions of his master, and brought comedies on the stage with applause.

Beaumont and *Fletcher* are always named together, as if they were two inseparable poets, whose works were all planned and executed in common. This idea, however, is not altogether correct. We know, indeed, but little of the circumstances of their lives: this much however is known, that *Beaumont* died very young; and that *Fletcher* survived his younger friend ten years, and continued so unremittingly active in his career as a dramatic poet, that several of his plays were first brought on the stage after his death, and some which he left unfinished were completed by another hand. The pieces collected under both names amount to upwards of fifty; and it is probable that of this number the half must be considered as the work of *Fletcher* alone. *Beaumont* and *Fletcher's* works first made their appearance a short

time after their death; the publishers have not given themselves the trouble to distinguish critically the share which belonged to each, and still less to afford us any information respecting the diversity of their talents. Some of their contemporaries have attributed boldness of imagination to Fletcher, and a mature judgment to his friend: the former, according to their opinion, was the inventive genius; the latter the directing and moderating critic. But this account rests on no foundation. It is now impossible to distinguish with certainty the hand of each; nor would the knowledge repay the labour. All the pieces ascribed to them, whether they proceed from one alone or from both, are composed in the same spirit and in the same manner. Hence it is probable that it was not so much the want of supplying the deficiencies of each other, as the great resemblance of their way of thinking, which induced them to continue so long and so inseparably united.

Beaumont and Fletcher began their career in the life-time of Shakspeare: Beaumont even died before him, and Fletcher only survived him nine years. From some allusions in the way of parody, we may conclude that they entertained no very extravagant admiration of their great predecessor; from whom however they learned so much, and unquestionably borrowed many of their thoughts. They followed his example in the whole form of their plays, regardless of the different principles of Ben Jonson and the imitation of the ancients. They drew, like him, from novels and romances; they mixed up pathetic and burlesque scenes with each other, and endeavoured, by the concatenation of the incidents, to excite the impression of the extraordinary and the wonderful. Their intention of surpassing Shakspeare in this species is often sufficiently evident; their contemporary eulogists indeed have no hesitation in ranking Shakspeare far below them, and assert that the English stage was first brought by Beaumont and Fletcher to perfection. The fame of Shakspeare was in reality in some degree eclipsed by them in the generation which immediately succeeded him, and in the time of Charles the Second they still possessed a greater popularity: the progress of time has, however, restored all the three to their due place. As on the theatre the highest excellence wears out by frequent repetition, and novelty must always possess a great charm, the dramatic art is consequently very much under the influence of fashion; it is more exposed than other branches of literature and the fine arts to the danger of passing rapidly from a grand and simple style to dazzling and superficial mannerism.

Beaumont and Fletcher were in fact men of the most distinguished talents; they hardly wanted anything but a more profound seriousness of mind, and that sagacity in art which observes

a due measure in everything, to deserve a place beside the greatest dramatic poets of all nations. They possessed an uncommon fecundity and flexibility of mind, and a felicitous ease which too often however degenerated into levity. The highest perfection they have hardly ever attained; and I should have little hesitation in affirming, that they had not even an idea of it: however, on several occasions they have approached quite close to it. And why was it denied them to take this last step? Poetry was not for them an inward devotion of the feeling and imagination, but a means to obtain brilliant results. Their first object was effect, which the great artist can hardly fail of attaining if he is determined above all things to satisfy himself. They were not players* like the most of their predecessors; but they lived in the neighbourhood of the theatre, were in constant intercourse with it, and possessed a perfect understanding of theatrical matters. They were also thoroughly acquainted with their contemporaries; but they found it more convenient to lower themselves to the taste of the public than to follow the example of Shakspeare, who elevated the public to himself. They lived in a vigorous age, which more willingly pardoned extravagancies of every description than feebleness and frigidity. They never therefore allowed themselves to be restrained by poetical or moral considerations; and in this confidence they found their account: they resemble in some measure somnambulists, who with their eyes shut tread in dangerous ways without falling. Even when they undertake what is most depraved they enter on it with a certain felicity. In the commencement of a degeneracy in the dramatic art, the spectators first lose the capability of judging of a play as a whole; hence Beaumont and Fletcher bestow the least attention on the harmony of the composition and the due proportion between all the different parts. They not unfrequently lose sight of a happily framed plot, and appear almost to forget it; they bring something else forward equally capable of affording pleasure and entertainment, but which does not belong to that place, and which has no preparation. They always excite curiosity, frequently compassion—they hurry us along with them; they succeed better however in exciting our expectation than in gratifying it. So long as we read them we feel ourselves keenly interested; but they leave very few imperishable impressions behind. They are least successful in their tragic attempts, because their feeling is not sufficiently drawn from the depths of human nature, and because

* In the privilege granted by James the First to the royal players, *Laurence Fletcher* is named along with Shakspeare as manager of the company. The poet's name was John Fletcher. Perhaps the former might be his brother or near relation.

they bestowed too little attention on the general consideration of human destinies: they succeed much better in comedy, and in those serious and pathetic pictures which occupy a middle place betwixt comedy and tragedy. The characters are often drawn in rather an arbitrary manner, and become untrue to themselves when it suits the momentary wants of the poet; in external matters they are sufficiently in keeping. Beaumont and Fletcher employ the whole strength of their talent in pictures of passion; but they enter little on the secret history of the heart; they pass over the first emotions and the gradual heightening of a feeling; they seize it as it were in its highest gradations, and then develop its symptoms with the most overpowering illusion, though with an exaggerated strength and fulness. But though its expression does not always possess the strictest truth, it still however appears natural; everything has free motion; nothing is laboriously constrained or far-fetched, however striking it may sometimes appear. They completely unite in their dialogue the familiar tone of real conversation and the appearance of momentary suggestion with poetical elevation. They even run into that favourite affectation of the natural which has been the means of obtaining such great success to some dramatic poets of our own time; but the latter sought it in the absence of all elevation of fancy; and hence, from necessity, they could not help falling into insipidity. Beaumont and Fletcher generally couple homeliness* with fancy; and they succeed in giving an extraordinary appearance to what is common, and thus preserve a certain fallacious image of the ideal. The morality of these writers is ambiguous. Not that they failed in strong colours to contrast greatness of soul and goodness with baseness and wickedness, or did not usually conclude with the disgrace and punishment of the latter; but an ostentatious generosity is often exhibited in lieu of duty and justice. Everything good and excellent arises in their pictures more from transient ebullition than fixed principle; they seem to place the virtues in the blood; and impulses of merely a selfish and instinct-like nature hold up their heads quite close to them as if they were of nobler origin. There is an incurable vulgar side of human nature which the poet should never approach but with a certain bashfulness, when he cannot avoid allowing it to be perceived; but instead of this Beaumont and Fletcher throw no veil whatever over nature. They express everything bluntly in words; they make the spectator the unwilling confidant of all that more noble minds endeavour even to hide from themselves. The indecencies in which these poets allowed themselves to indulge ex-

* *Natürlichkeit*, literally, naturalness — TRANS.

ceed all conception. The licentiousness of the language is the least evil; many scenes, nay, even whole plots, are so contrived that the very idea of them, not to mention the sight, is a gross insult to modesty. Aristophanes is a bold interpreter of sensuality; but like the Grecian statuaries in the figures of satyrs, &c. he banishes them into the animal kingdom to which they wholly belong; and judging of him according to the morality of his times he is much less offensive. But Beaumont and Fletcher exhibit the impure and nauseous colouring of vice to our view in quite a different sphere; their compositions resemble the sheet full of pure and impure animals in the vision of the Apostle. This was the universal inclination of the dramatic poets under James and Charles the First. They seem as if they purposely wished to justify the Puritans, who affirmed the theatres were so many schools of seduction and chapels of the Devil.

To those who merely read for amusement and general cultivation we can only recommend the works of Beaumont and Fletcher with some limitation.* For the practical artist, however, and the critical judge of dramatic poetry, an infinite deal may be learned from them; as well from their merits as their extravagancies. A minute dissection of one of their works, for which we have not here the necessary room, would serve to place this in the clearest light. These pieces had this convenience in representation in their time, that such great actors were not necessary to fill the principal characters as in Shakspeare's plays. To bring them on the stage in our days, it would be necessary to recast the most of them; with some of them we might succeed by omitting, moderating, and purging various passages.†

The Two Noble Kinsmen is deserving of more particular mention, as it is the joint production of Shakspeare and Fletcher. I see no ground for calling this in question; the piece, it is true, did not make its appearance till after the death of both; but what could be the motive with the editor or printer for any deception, as Fletcher's name was then, at least, in as great, if not more, celebrity than Shakspeare's? Were it the sole production of Fletcher, it would undoubtedly have to be ranked as the best of his serious and heroic pieces. However, it would be unfair to a writer of talent to take from him a work for the mere reason

* Hence I cannot approve of the undertaking, which has been recently commenced, of translating them into German. They are not at all adapted for our great public, and whoever makes a particular study of dramatic poetry will have little difficulty in finding his way to the originals.

† So far as I know only one play has yet been brought on the German theatre, namely, *Rule a Wife and have a Wife*, re-written by Schroder under the title of *Stille Wasser sind Tief* (Still Waters run Deep) which, when well acted, has always been uncommonly well received.

that it is too good for him. Might not Fletcher, who in his thoughts and images not unfrequently shows an affinity to Shakspeare, have for once had the good fortune to approach closer to him than usual? It would be still more dangerous to rest on the similarity of separate passages to others in Shakspeare. This might rather arise from imitation. I rely therefore entirely on the historical statement, which, probably, originated in a tradition of the players. There are connoisseurs, who, in the pictures of Raphael, which, as is well known, were not always wholly executed by himself, take upon them to determine what parts have been painted by Francesco Penni, or Giulio Romano, or some other scholar. I wish them success with the nicety of their discrimination; they are at least secure from contradiction, as we have no certain information on the subject. I would only put these connoisseurs in mind, that Giulio Romano allowed himself to be deceived by a copy of Andrea del Sarto from Raphael, and that, too, with regard to a figure which he had himself assisted in painting. The case in point is, however, a much more complicated problem in criticism. The design of Raphael's figures was at least his own, and the execution only was distributed in part among his scholars. But to find out how much of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* may belong to Shakspeare, we must not only be able to tell the difference of hands in the execution, but also to determine the influence of Shakspeare on the plan of the whole. When however he once joined another poet in the production of a work, he must also have accommodated himself, in a certain degree, to his views, and renounced the prerogative of unfolding his inmost peculiarity. Amidst so many grounds for doubting, if I might be allowed to hazard an opinion, I should say, that I think I can perceive the mind of Shakspeare in a certain ideal purity, which distinguishes this piece above all the others of Fletcher, and in the conscientious fidelity with which the story adheres to that of Chaucer's *Palamon and Arcite*. In the style Shakspeare's hand is at first discoverable in a brevity and fulness of thought bordering on obscurity; in the colour of the expression, almost all the poets of that time bear a strong resemblance to each other. The first acts are most carefully labour-ed; afterwards the piece is drawn out in an epic manner to too great a length; the dramatic law of quickening the action, towards the conclusion, is not sufficiently observed. The part of the daughter of the jailor, whose insanity is artlessly conducted in pure monologues, is certainly not Shakspeare's; for, in that case, we must suppose him to have had an intention of arrogantly imitating his own Ophelia.

Moreover, it was then a very general custom for two or even

three poets to join together in the production of one play. Besides the constant example of Beaumont and Fletcher we have many others. The consultations, respecting the plan, were generally held at merry meetings in taverns, where it happened upon a time, that one of such a party calling out in a poetical intoxication: "I will undertake to kill the King!" he was taken into custody as a traitor, till the misunderstanding was cleared up. This mode of composition may answer very well for the lighter species, which must be animated by social wit. With regard to theatrical effect, four eyes may, in general, see better than two, and mutual objections may be of use in finding out the most suitable means. But the highest poetical inspiration is much more eremitical than communicative; for it always seeks the expression for something which sets language at defiance, which can only be weakened and dissipated by detached words, and which can only be attained by the united impression of the complete work, the idea which hovers before it.

The Knight of the Burning Pestle, of Beaumont and Fletcher, is an incomparable and singular work in its kind. It is a parody of the chivalry romances; the thought is borrowed from *Don Quixote*, but the imitation is handled with freedom, and so particularly applied to Spenser's *Fairy Queen*, that it may pass for a second invention. But the peculiarly ingenious novelty of the piece consists in the combination of the irony of a chimerical abuse of poetry with another irony exactly the contrary, of the incapacity to comprehend any fable, and the dramatic form more particularly. A grocer and his wife come as spectators to the theatre: they are discontented with the piece which has just been announced; they demand a play in honour of the corporation, and Ralph, their apprentice is to act a principal part in it. They are well received; but still they are not satisfied, make their observations on everything, and incessantly address themselves to the players. Ben Jonson had already exhibited imaginary spectators, but they were either benevolent expounders or awkward censurers of the views of the poet: consequently, they always conducted his, the poet's, own cause. But the grocer and his wife represent a whole genus, namely, those unpoetical spectators, who are destitute of every feeling for art. The illusion with them becomes a passive error; the subject represented has all the effects of reality on them, they therefore resign themselves to the impression of each moment, and take part for or against the persons of the drama. On the other hand, they show themselves insensible to all genuine illusion, that is, of entering vividly into the spirit of the fable: Ralph, however heroically and chivalrously he may conduct himself, is

always for them Ralph their apprentice; and they take upon them, in the whim of the moment, to demand scenes which are quite inconsistent with the plan of the piece that has been commenced. In short, the views and demands with which poets are often oppressed by a prosaical public are personified in the most ingenious and amusing manner in these caricatures of spectators.

The faithful Shepherdess, a pastoral, is highly extolled by some English critics, as it is without doubt finished, with great diligence, in rhymed and, partly, in lyrical verses. Fletcher wished also to be classical for once, and did violence to his natural talent. Perhaps he had the intention of surpassing Shakspeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*; but the composition which he has ushered into the world is as heavy as that of the other was easy and aerial. The piece is overcharged with mythology and rural paintings, is untheatrical, and so far from the genuine ideality of a pastoral world, that it even contains the greatest vulgarities. We might rather call it an immodest eulogy of chastity. I am willing to hope that Fletcher was unacquainted with the *Pastor Fido* of Guarini, for otherwise his failure would admit of less justification.

We are here in want of room to speak in detail of the remaining works of Beaumont and Fletcher, although they might be made the subject of many instructive observations. On the whole, we may say of these writers that they have built a splendid palace, but merely in the suburbs of poetry, while Shakspeare has his royal residence in the central point of the capital.

The fame of *Massinger* has lately been revived by an edition of his works. Some literary men wish to rank him above Beaumont and Fletcher, as if he had approached more closely to the excellence of Shakspeare. I cannot find this. He appears to me to have the greatest resemblance to Beaumont and Fletcher in the plan of the pieces, in the tone of manners, and even in the language and negligences of versification. I would not undertake to decide, from internal symptoms, whether a play belonged to Massinger, or Beaumont and Fletcher. This applies also to the other contemporaries; for instance, to *Shirley*, of whom a couple of pieces are stated to have crept into the works ascribed to the two last named poets. There was then, as has already been said, a school of dramatic art in England, a school of which Shakspeare was the invisible and too often unacknowledged head; for Ben Jonson remained almost without successors. It is a peculiarity of manner to efface the features of personal originality, and to make the productions of various artists bear a resemblance to each other; and from manner no dramatic poet of this age, who succeeded Shakspeare, can be pronounced altogether free. When

however we compare their works with those of the succeeding age, we shall perceive between them nearly the same relation as between the paintings of the school of Michael Angelo and those of the last half of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century. Both are tainted with manner; but the manner of the former bears the trace of a sublime origin in the first ages; in the latter, all is little, affected, empty, and superficial. I repeat it: in a general history of the dramatic art, the first period of the English theatre is the only one of importance.

The plays of the least known writers of that time, (I venture to affirm this, though I am far from being acquainted with all of them) are more instructive for theory, and more remarkable, than the most celebrated of all the succeeding times.

In this condition nearly the theatre remained under the reign of Charles I. down to the year 1647, when the inveighings of the Puritans, who had long murmured at the theatre, and at last thundered loudly against it, were changed into laws. To act, or even behold, plays was prohibited under a severe penalty. A civil war followed, and the extraordinary circumstance here happened, that the players, who, in general, do not concern themselves much about forms of government, and whose whole care is usually devoted to the peaceable entertainment of their fellow citizens, compelled by want, joined that political party the interests of which were intimately connected with their own existence. Almost all of them entered the army of the king, many perished for the good cause, the survivors returned to London and continued to exercise their art in secret. Out of the ruins of all the former companies of actors, one alone was formed, which occasionally, though with great circumspection, gave representations at the country-seats of the great, in the vicinity of London. For among the other singularities to which the violence of those times gave rise, it was considered a proof of attachment to the old constitution to be fond of plays, and to reward and harbour those who acted them in private houses.

Fortunately the Puritans did not so well understand the importance of a censorship as the governments of our day, or the yet unprinted dramatic productions of the preceding age could not have issued from the press, by which means many of them would have been irrecoverably lost. These gloomy fanatics were such enemies of all that was beautiful, that they not only persecuted every liberal mental entertainment, calculated in any manner to adorn life, and more especially the drama as a public worship of Baal, but they even shut their ears to church music, as a demoniacal howling. If their ascendancy had maintained itself much longer, England must infallibly have been plunged

in an irremediable barbarousness. The oppression of the theatre continued down to the year 1660, when the free exercise of all arts returned with Charles the Second.

The influence which the government of this monarch had on the manners and spirit of the time, and the natural re-action against the party before dominant, are sufficiently well known. As the Puritans had brought republican principles and religious zeal into universal odium, this light-minded Monarch seemed expressly born to sport away all respect for the kingly dignity. England was inundated with the foreign follies and vices in his train. The court set the fashion of the most undisguised immorality, and this example was the more extensively contagious, as people imagined that they showed their zeal for the new order of things by an extravagant way of thinking and living. The fanaticism of the republicans had been accompanied with true strictness of manners, and hence nothing appeared more convenient than to obtain the character of royalists, by the extravagant inclination for all lawful and unlawful pleasures. The age of Louis the Fourteenth was nowhere imitated with greater depravity. The prevailing gallantry at the court of France was not without reserve and without a tenderness of feeling; they sinned, if I may so speak, with some degree of dignity, and no man ventured to attack what was honourable, though his own actions might not exactly coincide with it. The English played a part which was altogether unnatural to them: they gave themselves heavily up to levity; they everywhere confounded the coarsest licentiousness with free mental vivacity, and did not perceive that the sort of grace which is still compatible with depravity, disappears with the last veil which it throws off.

We may easily suppose the turn which the new formation of taste must have taken under such auspices. They possessed no real knowledge of the fine arts, and these were merely favoured like other foreign fashions and inventions of luxury. They neither felt a true want of poetry, nor had any relish for it: they merely wished to be entertained in a brilliant and light manner. The theatre, which in its former simplicity had attracted the spectators solely by the excellence of the dramatic works and the actors, was now furnished out with all the appendages with which we are at this day familiar; but what it gained in external decoration, it lost in internal worth.

To *Sir William Davenant* the English theatre, on its revival after the interruption which we have so often mentioned, owes the new institution, if this term may be here used. He introduced the Italian system of decoration, the *costume*, as well or ill as it was then understood, the opera music, and in general the

use of the orchestra. For this undertaking Charles the Second had furnished him with extensive privileges. Davenant was a sort of adventurer and wit, and in every manner worthy of the royal favour, to enjoy which dignity of character was never considered as a necessary requisite. He set himself to work in every way which the want of a rich theatrical repertory may render necessary; he made alterations of old pieces, wrote himself plays, operas, prologues, &c. But of all his writings nothing has escaped a merited oblivion.

Dryden soon became the hero of the stage, and remained so during a considerable time. This man, from his influence in fixing versification and diction, especially in rhyme, has acquired a reputation altogether disproportionate to his true merit. We shall not here inquire whether his translations of the Latin poets are not manneristical paraphrases, whether his political allegories, now that party interest is dead, can be read without the greatest wearisomeness; but his plays are, considered with reference to his great reputation, incredibly bad. *Dryden* had a flowing and easy versification, the knowledge which he possessed was rather considerable, but undigested, and all this was coupled with the talent of giving a certain appearance of novelty to what he borrowed from every quarter: his serviceable muse was the resource of an irregular life. He had besides an immeasurable vanity; he frequently disguises it under humble prologues, on other occasions he speaks out boldly and confidently, declaring that he is of opinion he has done better than *Shakspeare*, *Fletcher*, and *Jonson* (whom he places nearly on the same level); the merit of this however he was willing to ascribe to the refinement and advances of the age. The age indeed! as if that of *Elizabeth* compared with the one in which *Dryden* lived, were not in every respect "Hyperion to a Satyr!" *Dryden* played also the part of the critic: he furnished his pieces richly with prefaces and treatises on dramatic poetry, in which he chatters in a confused manner about the genius of *Shakspeare* and *Fletcher*, and the entirely opposite example of *Corneille*, of the original boldness of the British stage, and the rules of *Aristotle* and *Horace*. He imagined that he had invented a new species, namely, the heroic drama; as if tragedy from its nature had not been always heroic! If we are however to seek for a heroic drama which is not peculiarly tragic, we shall find that it had long been possessed by the Spaniards in the greatest perfection. From the uncommon facility of rhyming which *Dryden* possessed, it cost him but little labour to compose the most of his serious pieces entirely in rhyme. The rhymed verse of ten syllables supplies nearly,

with the English, the place of the Alexandrine; it has more freedom in the pauses, but on the other hand it wants the alternation of male and female rhymes; it proceeds in pairs exactly like the French Alexandrine, and in point of syllabic measure it is still more uniformly symmetrical. It communicates therefore inevitably a great stiffness to the dialogue. The manner of the older English poets, who generally used blank verse, and only introduced occasional rhymes, was infinitely preferable. Since that time however rhyme has come to be too exclusively rejected.

Dryden's plans are improbable even to silliness; the incidents are all thrown out without thought: the most wonderful theatrical strokes fall incessantly from the clouds. He cannot be said to have drawn a single character; for there is not a spark of nature in his persons. Passions, criminal and magnanimous sentiments, flow with indifferent levity from their lips without ever having dwelt in the heart: their chief delight is in heroical boasting. The tone of expression is by turns flat and madly bombastical, and frequently both at the same time: this poet resembles a man who walks upon stilts in a morass.—His wit is displayed in far-fetched sophistries; his imagination in long-spun similes awkwardly introduced. All these faults have been ridiculed by the Duke of Buckingham in his comedy of the *Rehearsal*. Dryden was meant under the name of Bayes, though some features are taken from Davenant and other contemporary writers. The vehicle of this critical satire might have been more artificial and diversified; the substance however is admirable, and the separate parodies are very amusing and ingenious. The taste for this depraved manner was, however, too prevailing to be restrained by the efforts of so witty a critic, who was at the same time a grandee of the kingdom.

Otway and Lee were younger competitors of Dryden in tragedy. Otway lived in poverty, and died young; under more favourable circumstances greater things would have been done by him. His first pieces in rhyme are imitations of the manner of Dryden; he also imitated *Berenice* of Racine. Two of his pieces in blank verse have kept possession of the stage; *The Orphan*, and *Venice Preserved*. These tragedies are far from being good; but there is matter in them, especially in the last; and amidst much empty declamation there are some truly pathetic passages. How little Otway understood the true rules of composition may be inferred from this, that he has taken the half of the scenes of his *Caius Marius* verbally, or with disfiguring changes, from the *Romeo and Juliet* of Shakspeare. Nothing more incongruous

can well be conceived than such an episode in Roman manners and in a historical drama. This impudent plagiarism is in no manner justified by his confessing it.

Dryden altered pieces of Shakspeare; for then, and even long afterwards, every person thought himself qualified for this task. He also wrote comedies; but *Wycherley* and *Congreve* were the first to acquire a name in this species. The mixed romantic drama was now laid entirely aside; all was either tragedy or comedy. The history of each of these species will therefore admit of being separately handled; if that, where we can perceive no progressive developement, but mere standing still, or even retrograding and an inconstant fluctuation in all manner of directions, can be said to have a history. However, the English under Charles the Second and Queen Anne, and down to the middle of the eighteenth century, had a series of comic writers, who may be all considered as belonging to one common class; for the most important diversity among them proceeds merely from an external circumstance, the varying tone of manners.

I have elsewhere in these Lectures shown that elegance of form is of the greatest importance in comedy; as from the want of care in this respect it is apt to degenerate into a mere prosaical imitation of reality, by which it forfeits its pretensions to either poetry or art. It is exactly however in the form that the English comedies are extremely negligent. In the first place, they are written wholly in prose. It has been well remarked by an English critic, that the banishment of verse from comedy had even a prejudicial influence on versification in tragedy. The older dramatists could elevate or lower the tone of the lambics at pleasure; from the exclusion of this verse from familiar dialogue it has become more pompous and inflexible. Shakspeare's comic scenes, it is true, are also written for the most part in prose; but in the mixed comedy, which has a serious, wonderful, or pathetic side, the prose with the elevated language of verse serves to mark the contrast between vulgar and ideal sentiments; it is a positive means of exhibition. Continued prose in comedy is nothing but the natural language, on which the poet has employed none of his skill in refining and smoothing down the apparently accurate imitation: it is that prose which Molière's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* has been speaking his whole life-time without suspecting it.

Moreover, the English comic poets tie themselves too little down to the unity of place. I have on various occasions declared, that I consider change of scene even a requisite, whenever a drama is to possess historical extent, or the magic of romance. But in the comedy of common life it is something altogether different. I am convinced that it would almost always have had an advan-

tageous influence on the conduct of the action in the English plays if their authors had, in this respect, subjected themselves to stricter laws.

The lively trickery of the Italian masks has always found a more unfavourable reception in England than in France. The fool or clown in Shakspeare's comedies is much rather an ironical humorist than a mimical buffoon. Intrigue in real life is foreign to the Northern nations both from their virtues and their defects: they have too much openness of character, and too little acuteness and nicety of understanding. It is remarkable that the Southern nations, with greater violence of passion, possess however the talent of dissembling in a much higher degree. In the North, life is wholly founded on mutual confidence. Hence, in the drama, the spectators, from being less practised in intrigue, are less inclined to be delighted with concealment of views and their success by bold artifice, and with the presence of mind which extricates from embarrassment in unexpected events of an untoward nature. However, there may be an intrigue in comedy, in the dramatic sense, though none of the persons carry on what is properly called intrigue. In entangling and disentangling their plots, however, the English comic writers are least deserving of praise. Their plans are defective in unity. I conceive that I have sufficiently exculpated Shakspeare from this reproach, which is rather merited by many of the pieces of Fletcher. If, however, the imagination has any share in a composition, it is far from being so necessary that all should be accurately connected together by cause and effect, as when the whole is merely held together by the understanding. The double or triple intrigue in many modern English comedies has been even acknowledged by English critics themselves.* The inventions to which they have had recourse are often everything but probable, without charming us by their happy novelty; they are chiefly deficient however in perspicuity and easy developement. The most of the English comedies are much too long. The authors overload their composition with characters; and we can see no reason why they have not divided them into several pieces. It is as if we were to compel to travel in the same stage-coach a greater number of persons, all strangers to each other, than there is properly room for: the journey becomes more inconvenient, and the entertainment not a whit more lively.

* Among others, the anonymous author of an ingenious letter to Garrick, prefixed to Coxeter's edition of *Massinger's Works*, says:—"What with their plots, and double plots, and counter-plots, and under-plots, the mind is as much perplexed to piece out the story as to put together the disjointed parts of an ancient drama."

The greatest merit of the English comic poets of this period consists in the drawing of character; yet though many of them have certainly shown much talent in this respect, I cannot ascribe to any of them a peculiar genius for character. Even in this department the older poets (not only Shakspeare, for that may easily be supposed, but even Fletcher and Jonson) are superior to them. The moderns seldom possess the faculty of seizing the most hidden and involuntary emotions, and giving a comic expression to them; they generally draw merely the natural or assumed surface of men. The same circumstance which was attended with such a prejudicial effect in France after Molière's time came also here into play. The comic muse, instead of becoming familiar with the way of living of the middle and lower ranks, her proper sphere, assumed an air of distinction: she squeezed herself into courts, and endeavoured to snatch a resemblance of the *beau-monde*. It was now no longer an English national, but a London comedy. The whole nearly turns on fashionable love-suits and fashionable raillery; the love affairs are either disgusting or insipid, and the raillery is always puerile and destitute of wit. These comic writers may have accurately hit the tone of their time; in this they did their duty; but they have reared a lamentable memorial of their age. In few periods has taste in the fine arts been at such a low ebb as about the close of the seventeenth and during the first half of the eighteenth century. The political machine kept its course: wars, negotiations, and changes of states, give to this age a certain historical splendour; but the comic poets and portrait-painters have revealed to us the secret of its pitifulness; the former in their copies of the dresses, and the latter in the imitation of the social tone. I am convinced that if we could listen to the conversation of the *beau-monde* of that day in the present, it would appear to us as prettily affected and full of tasteless pretension, as the hoops, the towering head-dresses, and high-heeled shoes of the women, and the huge perukes, cravats, wide sleeves, and ribbon-knots of the men.*

* When I give out good or bad taste in dress for an infallible criterion of social cultivation or deformity, this must be limited to the age in which a fashion comes up; for it may sometimes be very difficult to overturn a wretched fashion even when a better taste has long prevailed in other things. The dresses of the ancients were more simple, and consequently less subject to change of fashion; and the male dress, in particular, was almost unchangeable. However, even from the dresses alone, as we see them in the remains of antiquity, we may form a pretty accurate judgment of the character of the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans. In the female portrait-busts of the time of the later Roman Emperors we often find the head-dresses extremely tasteless; nay, even busts with perukes which may be taken off, probably for the purpose of changing them, as the originals themselves did.

The last, and not the least, defect of the English comedies is their offensiveness. I may sum up the whole in one word by saying, that after all we know of the licentiousness of manners under Charles the Second, we are still lost in astonishment at the audacious ribaldry of Wycherley and Congreve.—Decency is not merely violated in the grossest manner in single speeches, and frequently in the whole plot, but in the character of the rake, the fashionable debauchee, a moral scepticism is directly preached up, and marriage is the constant subject of their ridicule. Beaumont and Fletcher portrayed an irregular but vigorous nature: nothing however can be more repulsive than rude depravity coupled with claims to higher refinement. Under Queen Anne manners became again more decorous: and this may easily be traced in the comedies: in the series of English comic poets, *Wycherley*, *Congreve*, *Farquhar*, *Vanbrugh*, *Steele*, *Cibber*, &c., we may perceive something like a gradation from the most unblushing indecency to a tolerable degree of modesty. However, the example of the predecessors has had more than a due influence on the successors. From prescriptive fame pieces keep possession of the stage, such as no man in the present day durst venture to bring out. It is a remarkable phenomenon, the causes of which are deserving of mention, that the English nation in the last half of the eighteenth century passed all at once from the most opposite way of thinking to an almost over-scrupulous strictness of manners in social conversation, in romances and plays, and in the plastic arts.

Some writers have said of Congreve that he had too much wit for a comic poet. These people must have rather a singular conception of wit. The truth is, that Congreve and the other writers above-mentioned possess in general much less comic than epigrammatic wit. The latter often degenerates into a laborious straining for wit. Steel's dialogue, for example, puts us too much in mind of the letters in the *Spectator*. Farquhar's plot seems to me to be of all of them the most ingenious.

The latest period of English comedy begins nearly with Colman. Since that time the morals have been irreproachable, and much has been done in refined and original characterization; the form, however, has on the whole remained the same, and in that respect, I do not think the English comedies at all models.

Tragedy has been often attempted in England in the eighteenth century, but a genius of the first rank has never made his appearance. They laid aside the manner of Dryden, however, and that was certainly an improvement. Rowe was an honest admirer of Shakspeare, and his modest reverence for this superior genius was rewarded by a return to nature and truth. The

traces of imitation are not to be mistaken: the parts of Gloster in *Jane Shore* is even directly borrowed from *Richard the Third*. Rowe did not possess boldness and vigour, but sweetness and feeling; he could excite the softer emotions, and hence, in his *Fair Penitent*, *Jane Shore*, and *Lady Jane Gray*, he has successfully chosen female heroines and their weaknesses for his subject.

Addison possesses an elegant mind, but he was by no means a poet. He undertook to purify the English tragedy, by a compliance with the supposed rules of good taste. We might have expected from a judge of the ancients, that he would have endeavoured to approach the Greek models. Whether he had any such intention I know not, but certain it is, that he has produced nothing but a tragedy after the French cut. *Cato* is a feeble and frigid piece, almost destitute of action, without one truly overpowering moment. Addison has so narrowed a great and heroic picture by his timid manner of treating it, that he could not even fill up the frame without foreign intermixtures. Hence, he had recourse to the traditional love intrigues; if we count well, we shall find no fewer than six persons in love in this piece: Cato's two sons, Marcia and Lucia, Juba and Sempronius. The good Cato cannot therefore avoid as a provident father of a family to arrange two marriages at the conclusion. With the exception of Sempronius, the villain of the piece, the lovers are one and all somewhat silly. Cato, who ought to be the soul of the whole, is hardly ever shown to us in action; nothing remains for him to do, but to admire himself and die. It might be thought that the stoical determination of suicide, without struggle and without passion, is not a fortunate subject; but correctly speaking, no subjects are unfortunate, everything depends on the seizing each in the correct manner. Addison has been induced, by the wretched unity of place, to leave out Cæsar, the only worthy contrast to Cato; and, in this respect, even Metastasio has managed matters better. The language is pure and simple, but without vigour; the rhymeless Iambic gives more freedom to the dialogue, and an air somewhat less conventional than it has in the French tragedies; but in vigorous eloquence, Cato remains far behind them.

Addison took his measures well; he brought all the great and small critics, with Pope at their head, the whole militia of good taste under arms, that he might excite a high expectation of the piece which he had produced with so much labour. *Cato* was universally praised, as a work without an equal. And on what foundation do these boundless claims rest? On regularity of form? This had been already observed by the French poets for nearly

a century, and notwithstanding the constraint, they had often attained a much stronger pathetic effect. Or on the political sentiments? But in a single dialogue between Brutus and Cassius, in Shakspeare, there is more of a Roman way of thinking, and republican energy, than in all *Cato*.

I doubt whether this piece could ever have produced a powerful impression, but its reputation has certainly had a prejudicial influence on tragedy in England. The example of *Cato*, and the translations of French tragedies, which became every day more and more frequent, could not, it is true, render universal the belief in the infallibility of the rules; but they were held in sufficient consideration to disturb the conscience of the dramatic poets, and they therefore availed themselves of the prerogatives inherited by them from Shakspeare, with an extreme degree of timidity. On the other hand, these prerogatives were at the same time problems; it requires an extraordinary degree of skill to manage such great masses as Shakspeare used to bring together, with simplicity and perspicuity: more drawing and perspective are required for an extensive fresco painting, than for a small oil picture. In renouncing the intermixture of comic scenes when they no longer understood their ironical aim, they did perfectly right: Southern still attempted them in his *Oroonoko*, but they exhibit a wretched appearance in his hands. With the general knowledge and admiration of the ancients in England, we might have expected some attempt at a true imitation of the Greek tragedy; no such imitation has however made its appearance; in the choice and handling of their materials, they show an undoubted affinity to the French. Some poets of celebrity in other departments of poetry, Young, Thomson, Glover, have written tragedies, but no one of them has displayed any true tragical talent.

They have now and then had recourse to familiar tragedy to assist the barrenness of imagination; but the moral aim, which must exclusively prevail in this species, is a true extinguisher of genuine poetical inspiration. They have therefore been satisfied with a few attempts. *The Merchant of London*, and *The Gamester*, are the only plays in this way which have attained any considerable reputation. *The Merchant of London* is remarkable from having been praised by Diderot and Lessing, as a model deserving of imitation. This error could only have escaped from Lessing, in the keenness of his hostility to the French conventional tone. For in reality, we must perpetually bear in mind the honest views of Lillo, to prevent us from finding *The Merchant of London* as laughable as it is certainly trivial. Whoever possesses so little knowledge of the world and of men ought

not to set up for a public lecturer on morals. We might draw a very different conclusion from this piece, from that which the author had in view, namely, that we ought to make young people early acquainted with prostitutes, to prevent them from entertaining a violent passion, and being at last led to steal and murder, for the first wretch who spreads her snares for them, (which they cannot possibly avoid). Besides, I cannot approve of making the gallows first visible in the last scene; such a piece ought always to be acted with a place of execution in the back ground. With respect to the edification to be drawn from a drama of this kind, I should prefer the histories of malefactors, which are usually printed in England at executions; they contain, at least, real facts, instead of awkward fictions.

Garrick's appearance forms an epoch in the history of the English theatre, as he chiefly dedicated his talents to the great characters of Shakspeare, and built his own fame on the growing admiration for this poet. Before his time, Shakspeare had only been brought on the stage in mutilated and disfigured alterations. Garrick returned on the whole to the true originals, though he still allowed himself to make some very unfortunate changes. It appears to me, that the only alteration of Shakspeare which is excusable is, the leaving out a few things in conformity to the taste of the time. Garrick was undoubtedly a great actor. Whether he always conceived the parts of Shakspeare in the sense of the poet I should be inclined to doubt, from the very circumstances stated in the eulogies on his acting. He excited, however, a noble emulation to represent in a worthy manner the favourite poet of the nation; this has ever since been the highest object of the actors, and even at present they can boast of men whose histrionic talents are deservedly celebrated.

But why has this revival of the admiration of Shakspeare remained unproductive for dramatic poetry? Because he has been too much the subject of astonishment, as an unapproachable genius who owed everything to nature and nothing to art. His success, they think is without example, and can never be repeated; nay, it is even forbidden to venture into the same region. Had they considered him more from the point of view which an artist ought to take, they would have endeavoured to understand the principles which he followed in his practice, and tried to become masters of them. A meteor appears, disappears, and leaves no trace behind; the course of a heavenly body, however, may be delineated by the astronomer, for the sake of investigating more accurately the laws of general mechanics.

I am not sufficiently acquainted with the latest dramatic productions of the English, to enter into a minute account of them.

That the dramatic art and the taste of the public are, however, in a wretched decline, I think I may safely infer, from the following phenomenon. Some years ago, several German plays found their way to the English stage; plays, which it is true, are with us the favourites of the multitude, but which are not considered by the intelligent as forming a part of our literature, and in which distinguished actors are almost ashamed of earning applause. These pieces have met with extraordinary favour in England; they have properly speaking as the Italians say, *fatto furore*, though the critics did not fail to declaim against their immorality, veiled over by sentimental hypocrisy. From the poverty of our dramatic literature, the admission of such abortions into Germany may be easily comprehended; but what can be alleged in favour of this depravity of taste in a nation like the English, which possesses such treasures, and which must therefore descend from such an elevation? Certain writers are nothing in themselves; they are merely symptoms of the disease of their age; and were we to judge from them, there is but too much reason to fear that, in England, an effeminate sentimentality in private life is more frequent, than from the astonishing political greatness and energy of the nation we should be led to suppose.

May the romantic drama and the grand historical drama, these truly native species, be again speedily revived, and may Shakespeare find such worthy imitators as some of those whom Germany has to produce!

LECTURE XIV.

Spanish Theatre.—Its three periods; Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Calderon.—Spirit of the Spanish poetry in general.—Influence of the national history on it.—Form, and various species of the Spanish drama.—Decline since the beginning of the eighteenth century.

THE riches of the Spanish stage have become proverbial, and it has been more or less the custom of the Italian, French, and English dramatists, to draw from this source, and generally without acknowledgment. I have often had occasion to remark this in the preceding lectures; it was incompatible, however, with my purpose to give an enumeration of what has been so borrowed, which would indeed have assumed rather a bulky appearance, and which could not have been rendered complete without great labour. What has been taken from the most celebrated Spanish poets may be easily pointed out; but the writers of the second and third rank have been equally laid under contribution, and their works are not easily met with out of Spain. Ingenuous boldness, joined to easy clearness of intrigue, is so exclusively peculiar to the Spanish dramatists, that I consider myself justified, whenever I find these in a work, to suspect a Spanish origin, even though the circumstance may have been unknown to the author himself, who drew his plagiarism from a nearer source.*

From the political preponderance of Spain in the sixteenth century, the knowledge of the Spanish language became widely diffused throughout Europe. Even in the first half of the seventeenth century we find many traces of an acquaintance with the Spanish literature in France, Italy, England, and Germany; since that time, however, the study of it has become everywhere more and more neglected, till of late some zeal has again been excited for it in Germany. In France they have no other idea of the Spanish theatre, than that which they may form from the translations of Linguet. These have been again translated into German, and their number has been increased by others, in no respect better, derived immediately from the originals. The translators have, however, confined themselves almost exclusively to the department of comedies of intrigue, and though all the

* Thus for example, *The Servant of two Masters*, of Goldoni, a piece highly distinguished above his others for the most amusing intrigue, passes for an original. A learned Spaniard has assured me, that he knows it to be a Spanish invention. Perhaps, Goldoni had here merely an older Italian imitation before him.

Spanish plays are versified, with the exception of a few *Entremeses*, *Saynetes*, and those of the latest period, they have reduced the whole to prose, and even considered themselves entitled to praise for having carefully removed everything which may be called poetical ornament. In such a mode of proceeding nothing but the material scaffolding of the original work could remain; the beautiful colouring must have disappeared with the forms of the execution. That translators who could show such a total want of judgment in poetical excellencies would not choose the best pieces in the whole store, may be easily supposed. The species in question, though the invention of innumerable intrigues, of a description of which we find but few examples in the theatrical literature of other countries, certainly shows an astonishing acuteness, is yet by no means the most valuable part of the Spanish theatre, which displays a much greater brilliancy in the handling of wonderful, mythological, or historical subjects.

The selection published by *De la Huerta* in sixteen small volumes, under the title of *Teatro Hespamol*, with introductions giving an account of the authors of the pieces and the different species, can afford no very extensive acquaintance with the Spanish theatre, even to a person possessed of the language; for his collection is almost exclusively limited to the department of comedies in modern manners, and he has admitted no pieces of the earlier period, composed by Lope de Vega or his predecessors. Blankenburg and Bouterweck* among us have laboured to throw light on the earlier history of the Spanish theatre, before it acquired its proper shape and attained literary dignity, a subject involved in a good deal of obscurity. But even at an after period, an amazing deal was written for the stage which never appeared in print, and which is either now lost or only exists in manuscript; while, on the other hand, there is hardly an instance of a piece being printed without having first been brought on the stage. A correct and perfect history of the Spanish theatre can only therefore be executed in Spain. The notices of the above-mentioned German writers are however of use, though not free from errors; their opinions respecting the poetical merit of the pieces, and the general view which they have taken, appear to me exceedingly objectionable.

The first advances of the dramatic art in Spain were made in the last half of the sixteenth century; and it ceased to flourish with the end of the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth, since the war of the succession, which seems to have had a very

* The former in his annotations on *Sulzers Theorie der schönen Künste*, the latter in his *Geschichte der Spanischen Poesie*.

prejudicial influence on the Spanish literature in general, very little can be mentioned which does not display wild incoherency, retrogression, retention of the old observances without meaning, or tame imitations of foreign productions. The Spanish literati of the last generation frequently boast of their old national poets, the people entertain a strong attachment to them, and in Mexico, as well as Madrid, their pieces are always represented with impassioned applause.

The various epochs of formation of the Spanish theatre may be designated from the names of three celebrated writers, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and Calderon.

The oldest information and opinions on this subject of any importance are to be found in the writings of Cervantes; chiefly in *Don Quixote*, in the dialogue with the Canon, in the preface to his later plays, in the journey to Parnassus. He has also thrown out detached observations on the subject in various other places. He had witnessed in his youth the commencement of the dramatic art in Spain; the poetical poverty of which, as well as the low state of the theatrical decorations, are very humorously described by him. He was justified in looking upon himself as one of the founders of this art; for before he gained immortal fame by his *Don Quixote* he had diligently laboured for the stage, and from twenty to thirty pieces composed by him, so negligently does he speak of them, had been acted with applause. He made no higher claims on that account, nor after they had served their momentary destination did he allow any of them to be printed; and it was only lately that two of those earlier labours were for the first time published.—One of these plays, probably the first of Cervantes, *The Way of Living in Algiers*, (*El Trato de Argel*), still bears traces of the infancy of the art in the preponderance of narrative, in the general meagreness, and in the want of prominence in the figures and situations. The other however, *The Destruction of Numantia*, stands altogether on the elevation of the tragical cothurnus; and, from the unconscious and unsought-for approximation to antique grandeur and purity, forms a remarkable phenomenon in the history of modern poetry. The idea of destiny prevails in it throughout; the allegorical figures which enter between the acts supply, though in another way, nearly the place of the chorus in the Greek tragedies; they guide our consideration and propitiate our feeling. A great deed of heroic determination is completed; the extremity of suffering is endured with constancy; but it is the deed and the suffering of a whole nation whose individual members may be almost said to appear only as examples, while the Roman heroes seem merely the instruments of fate. There is,

if I may say so, a sort of Spartan pathos in this piece: every separate consideration is swallowed up in the feeling for country; and by a reference to the modern warlike fame of his nation, the poet has contrived to connect the ancient history with the circumstances immediately before him.

Lope de Vega appeared and soon became the sole monarch of the stage, so that Cervantes was forced to give way to him. Yet he would not altogether relinquish claims founded on earlier approbation; and shortly before his death, in the year 1615, he printed eight plays and an equal number of smaller interludes, as he could not get them brought on the stage. They have generally been found very much inferior to his other prose and poetical works; their modern editor is even of opinion that they are parodies and satires of the vitiated taste of the time: but we have only to read them without any prepossession to find this hypothesis ridiculous. Had Cervantes entertained such a purpose, he would have contrived to attain it in quite a different way in one piece, and also in a manner both highly amusing and not liable to misconception. No, they were intended as pieces in the manner of Lope: Cervantes, contrary to his conviction, endeavoured to comply with the taste of his contemporaries by a display of greater variety, of wonderful plots, and theatrical effect. But it would appear that he considered the superficial in composition as the main requisite for applause; it is at least, for the most part, extremely loose and dissolute, and we have no examples in his prose works of a similar degree of levity. Hence, as he partly renounced his peculiar excellencies, we need not be astonished that he did not succeed in surpassing Lope in his own walk. Two, however, of these pieces, *The Christian Slaves in Algiers* (*Los Banos de Argel*), an alteration of the piece before mentioned, and *The Labyrinth of Love*, are deserving of great praise in their whole plot; all of them contain so many beautiful and ingenious traits, that when we consider them by themselves, and without any reference to the destruction of Numantia, we feel disposed to look on the opinion pretty generally entertained by the Spanish critics as a mere prejudice. But again, when we compare them with the pieces of Lope, or bear in mind the higher excellencies to which Calderon had accustomed his public, we shall find that this opinion will admit of conditional justification. We may, on the whole, allow that the mind of this poet was more inclined to the epic, taking the word in its more extensive signification, for the narrative form of composition; and that the soft and unassuming manner in which he delights to excite the mind is not well suited to the making the most of every moment, and the rapid compression, which are required on the theatre. But when we again view the

energetical pathos in *The Destruction of Numantia*, we must consider it as merely accidental that Cervantes did not dedicate himself wholly to this species, and find room in it for the development of all the properties of his inventive mind.

The sentence pronounced by Cervantes on the dramas of his later contemporaries is one of the neglected voices which have been raised from time to time in Spain, insisting on the imitation of the ancient classics, while the national taste had decidedly declared itself for the romantic drama in its boldest form. On this subject Cervantes, from causes which we may easily comprehend, was not altogether impartial. Lope de Vega had followed him as a dramatic writer, and by his greater fruitfulness and brilliancy of effect had driven him from the stage; a circumstance which ought certainly to be taken into account in explaining the discontent of Cervantes in his advanced age with the direction of the public taste and constitution of the theatre. It would appear, too, that in his poetical mind there still remained a prosaical corner from which he was induced to reject the inclination to the wonderful, and the boldness of plays of fancy, as contrary to probability and nature. On the authority of the ancients he recommended a purer separation of the species; whereas the romantic art endeavours to blend all the elements of poetry in its productions, as he himself did in his romances and novels; and he censured with equal severity the rapid change of time and place, as true offences against propriety. It is remarkable that Lope himself was unacquainted with his own rights, and confessed that he wrote his pieces, contrary to the rules with which he was well acquainted, merely for the sake of pleasing the multitude. That the multitude entered peculiarly into his consideration is certainly true; still he remains one of the most extraordinary of all the popular and favourite theatrical writers who ever lived, and well deserves to be called in all seriousness by Cervantes, his rival and adversary, a wonder of nature.

The pieces of Lope de Vega, numerous beyond all belief, have partly never been printed; and the collection of those that are printed is seldom to be found complete excepting in Spain. Many pieces are probably falsely attributed to him; an abuse of which Calderon also complains. I know not whether Lope himself ever gave any list of the pieces actually composed by him; indeed he could hardly at last have remembered the whole of them. However, on reading a small number we shall find ourselves pretty far advanced in our acquaintance with this poet; nor need we be afraid of having failed to peruse the most distinguished, as in his separate productions he does not surprise us by elevation of flight nor by laying open the unknown depths of his mind. This pro-

lific writer, at one time too much idolized, at another too much depreciated, appears here undoubtedly in the most advantageous light, as the theatre was the best school for the correction of his three great errors, want of connexion, diffuseness, and an unnecessary parade of learning. In some of his pieces, especially the historical founded on old romances and traditional tales, for instance, *King Wamba*, *The Youthful Tricks of Bernardo del Carpio*, *the Battlements of Toro*, &c. there prevails a certain rudeness, which is not however without character, and seems to have been purposely chosen for the subjects: in others, which portrays the manners of his own time, as for instance, *The Lively Fair One of Tolédo*, *The Fair Deformed*, we may observe a highly cultivated social tone. All of them contain, along with truly interesting situations, a number of inimitable jokes; and there are perhaps very few of them which would not, if properly handled and adapted to our stages, produce a great effect in the present day. Their chief defects are, a profusion of injudicious invention, and negligence in the execution. They resemble the groups which an ingenious sketcher scrawls on paper without any preparation and without even taking the necessary time; in which, notwithstanding this hasty levity, every line has its life and signification. Besides the want of careful finishing, the works of Lope are deficient only in depth, and in those finer relations which constitute the peculiar mysteries of the art.

If the Spanish theatre had not advanced farther, if it had possessed only the works of Lope and the more eminent of his contemporaries, as *Guillen de Castro*, *Montalban*, *Molina*, *Matos-Fragoso*, &c., we should have to praise it, much rather for grandeur of design and for promising subjects than for matured perfection. But *Don Pedro Calderon de la Barca* now made his appearance, as prolific and diligent a writer as Lope, and a poet of a very different kind; a poet if ever any man deserved that name: The wonder of nature, the enthusiastic applause, and the sovereignty of the stage were renewed in a much higher degree. The years of Calderon keep equal pace with those of the seventeenth century; he was consequently sixteen when Cervantes, and thirty-five when Lope died, whom he survived nearly half a century. According to the account of his biographer, Calderon wrote more than a hundred and twenty plays, more than a hundred spiritual allegorical acts, a hundred merry interludes or *Saynetes** besides a number of poems which were not dramatical.

* This account is perhaps somewhat rhetorical. The most complete and in every respect the best edition of the plays, that of *Sponzet*, contains only a hundred and eight pieces. At the request of a great Lord, Calderon, shortly before his death, gave a list of his genuine works. He names a hundred and eleven

As from his fourteenth to his eighty-first year, that in which he died, he continued to produce dramatic works, they divide themselves over a great space, and we cannot therefore suppose that he wrote with the same haste as Lope; he had sufficient leisure to consider his plans maturely, which he also, without doubt, must have done. In the execution, he could not fail to possess great readiness from his extensive practice.

In this almost incalculable abundance of works, we find nothing thrown out at random; all is finished, agreeably to the most secure and well-founded principles, and with the most profound views of art. This cannot be denied even if we should mistake the pure and high style of the romantically-theatrical manner, and consider these bold flights of poetry, on the extreme boundaries of the conceivable, as erroneous illusions. For Calderon has everywhere converted that into fresh material which passed with his predecessors for form;—nothing less than the noblest and most exquisite flower could satisfy him. Hence it happens that he repeats himself in many expressions, images, comparisons, nay, even in many plays of situation; for he was too rich to be under the necessity of borrowing from himself, not to mention from others. The effect on the stage is the first thing for Calderon; but this consideration, which is generally felt as a restraint, is uniformly positive with him. I know of no dramatist equally skilled in converting effect into poetry; at once so sensibly vigorous and so ethereal.

His dramas divide themselves into four principal classes: compositions on sacred subjects taken from scripture and legends; historical; mythological, or from other fictitious materials; finally, pictures of social life in modern manners.

The pieces founded on the history of his own country are historical in the more limited acceptance. The earlier periods of Spanish history have often been seized by Calderon with the

plays; but among them there are considerably more than three which are not to be found in the collection of Apontes. Some of them may, indeed, be concealed under other titles, as, for instance, the piece which Calderon himself calls, *El Tuzani de la Alpujarra*, is named in the collection *Amar despues de la muerte*. Others are unquestionably omitted, for instance, a *Don Quixote*, which I should be particularly desirous of seeing. We may infer from many circumstances that Calderon had a great reverence for Cervantes. The collection of the *Autos sacramentales* contains only seventy-two, and several of them are not mentioned by Calderon. And yet he lays the greatest stress on these; wholly devoted to religion, he had become in his age more indifferent towards the temporal plays of his muse, although he did not reject them, and still continued to add to the number. It might well be with him as with an excessively wealthy man, who, in a general computation, is apt to forget many of the items of his capital. I have never yet been able to see any of the *Saynetes* of Calderon; I can even find no account whether or not they have been actually collected and printed.

utmost truth; but, in general, he had too decided, I might almost say, too burning a predilection for his own nation, to enter into the peculiarities of another; at most he could have portrayed what inclines towards the sun, the South and the East; but classical antiquity, as well as the North of Europe, were altogether foreign to his conception. Materials of this description he has, therefore taken wholly in a fanciful sense: the Greek mythology became in general, a delightful tale in his hands, and the Roman history a majestic hyperbole.

The sacred compositions must, however, in some degree, be ranked as historical; for although surrounded with rich fiction, as is always the case in Calderon, they yet generally express the character of Biblical or legendary history with great fidelity. They are distinguished however from the other historical pieces by the frequent prominence of a significant allegory, and by the religious enthusiasm with which the poet, in the spiritual acts destined for the celebration of the Corpus Christi festival, exhibits the universe, as it were, under an allegorical representation in the purple flames of love. In this last class he was most admired by his contemporaries, and here he himself set the highest value on his labours. But without having read, at least one of them in a truly poetical translation, my auditors could not form the slightest idea of them; the consideration of these acts would demand a difficult investigation into the admissibility of allegory into dramatical composition. I shall therefore confine myself to those of his dramas which are not allegorical. The characterization of these I shall be very far from exhausting; I can merely exhibit a few of their more general features.

Of the great multitude of ingenious and acute writers, who were then drawn by the dazzling brilliancy of the stage into the theatrical career, the most were merely imitators of Calderon; a few deserve to be named along with him, as *Don Augustin Moreto*, *Don Francisco de Roxas*, *Don Antonio de Solis*, the acute and eloquent historian of the conquest of Mexico, &c. The dramatic literature of the Spaniards can even boast of a royal poet, the great patron and admirer* of Calderon, to whom several anonymous pieces, with the epigraph *de un ingento de esta corte*, are ascribed. All the writers of that day wrote in a kin-

* This monarch seems, in reality, to have had a relish for the peculiar excellence of his favourite poet, whom he considered as the brightest ornament of his court. He was so prepossessed in favour of the national drama, that he refused to allow the introduction of the Italian opera, which was then in general favour at the different European courts: an example which deserves to be held up to the German Princes, who have hitherto, from indifference towards everything national, and partiality for everything foreign, done all in their power to discourage the German poets.

dred spirit; it was a true school of art. Many of them have peculiar excellencies, but Calderon in boldness, fulness, and profundity, soars beyond them all; in him the romantic drama of the Spaniards attained the summit of perfection.

We shall endeavour to give a feeble idea of the spirit and form of these compositions, differing so widely from every other European production. For this purpose however we must enter in some measure into the character of the Spanish poetry in general, and those historical circumstances by which it has been determined.

The beginnings of the Spanish poetry are extremely simple: its two fundamental forms were the *romanze* and the song, and we everywhere imagine we hear the accompaniment of the guitar in these original national-melodies. The *romanze*, which is half Arabian in its origin, was at first a simple heroic tale; afterwards it became a very artificial species, adapted to various uses, but in which the picturesque ingredient always predominated, and sometimes displayed the most brilliant luxuriance of colours. The song again, almost destitute of imagery, expressed tender feelings in ingenious turns; it extends its sportiveness to the very limits where the self-meditation, which endeavours to convert an inexpressible disposition of mind into thought, wings again the thought to visionary anticipation. The forms of the song were diversified by the introduction into poetry of what is effected in music by variation. Still however the rich properties of the Spanish language could not fully develop themselves in these species of poetry, which were rather tender and infantine than elevated. Hence towards the beginning of the sixteenth century they adapted the more comprehensive forms of the Italian poetry, *Ottave*, *Terzine*, *Canzoni*, *Sonetti*; and the Castilian language, the proudest daughter of the Latin, was then first enabled to display her whole power in dignity, beautiful boldness, and splendour of imagery. The Spanish is less soft than the Italian on account of the guttural sound, and the frequent termination with consonants; but its tones are, if possible, more full, proceed still more from the breast, and fill the ear with a pure metallic resonance. It had not yet altogether lost the rough strength and cordiality of the Goths, when oriental intermixtures gave it a wonderful degree of sublimity, and elevated a poetry, intoxicated as it were with aromatic vapours, far above all the scruples of the sober west.

The stream of poetical inspiration, swelled by every proud consciousness, increased with the growing fame in arms of this formerly so free and heroic nation. The Spaniards act a glorious part in the history of the middle ages, a part but too much

forgotten by the envious ingratitude of modern times. They were then the forlorn out-post of Europe; they lay on their Pyrenean peninsula as in a camp, exposed to the incessant eruptions of the Arabians, always ready for renewed conflicts without foreign assistance. The foundation of their Christian kingdom, for centuries, from the time when the descendants of the Goths, who had been driven back into the northern mountains again, rushed forth from these places of refuge, down to the complete expulsion of the Moors from Spain, was one single and long-continued adventure; nay, the preservation of Christianity in that land against such a preponderating power, seemed even to be the wondrous work of more than mere mortal guidance. Always accustomed to fight at the same time for his liberty and his religion, the Spaniard clung to the latter with a fiery zeal, as an acquisition dearly purchased by the noblest blood. Every consolation of divine worship was a reward of heroic exertion; every church might be considered by him as a trophy of his ancestors. True to his God and his king to the last drop of his blood; adhering inviolably to his honour; proud, yet humble before every thing accounted holy; serious, moderate, and modest; such was the character of the old Castilian: and yet we now ridicule this worthy people because they could not bring themselves to lay aside the beloved sword, the instrument of their high calling, even when behind the plough.

Of the love of war which so many circumstances had thus served to keep alive, and the spirit of enterprise of their subjects, the monarchs of Spain availed themselves at the close of the fifteenth and during the sixteenth century in their attempts to attain universal monarchy; and while the Spanish arms were thus employed to effect the subjugation of other nations, the people themselves were deprived of their own political freedom. The faithless and tyrannical policy of Philip the Second has unmeritedly drawn down on the nation the hatred of foreigners. The Macchiavelism of the princes and popular leaders in Italy was a universal character, all ranks were infected with the same love of artifice and fraud; but in Spain this can only be laid to the charge of the government, and even the religious persecutions seldom or never proceeded from the out-breaking of a universal popular fury. The Spaniard never presumed to examine into the conduct of his spiritual and worldly superiors, and carried on their wars of aggression and ambition with the same fidelity and bravery which he had formerly displayed in his own wars of defence. Personal fame, and a supposed zeal for religion, blinded him with respect to the justice of his cause. Unexampled enterprises were successfully executed, a newly dis-

covered world beyond the ocean had been subjugated by a handful of bold adventurers; individual instances of cruelty and avarice had stained the splendour of the most determined heroism, but the mass of the nation remained uninfected by this degeneracy. The spirit of chivalry has nowhere outlived its political existence so long as in Spain. Long after the internal prosperity, together with the foreign influence of the nation, had experienced a deep decline in consequence of the ruinous errors of Philip the Second, this spirit propagated itself down to the flourishing period of their literature, and imprinted its stamp upon it in a manner which cannot be mistaken. Here was renewed in a certain degree, though with much higher mental cultivation, the dazzling appearance of the middle ages, when princes and lords employed themselves in the composition of songs of love and heroism, when the knights, with their hearts full of their mistresses, and devotion to the holy sepulchre, exposed themselves joyfully to the most dangerous adventures in their pilgrimages to the promised land, when even a lion-hearted king touched the tender lute to sounds of amorous lamentation. The Spanish poets were not, as was usual in other European countries, courtiers, scholars, or engaged in some civil employment; of noble birth for the most part, they led a warlike life. The union of the sword and the pen, of the exercise of arms and the nobler mental arts, was their watch-word. Garcilaso, one of the founders of the Spanish poetry under Charles the Fifth, descended from the Peruvian Yncas, accompanied by his amiable muse to Africa, fell before the walls of Tunis; Camoens the Portuguese, sailed as a soldier to the remotest Indies, in the track of the glorious discoverer whom he celebrated; Don Alonzo de Ercilla composed his *Araucana* during a war with revolted savages, in a tent at the foot of the Cordilleras, or in wildernesses yet untrodden by men, or in a ship tossed about on the ocean; Cervantes purchased the honour of having combated in the battle of Lepanto as a common soldier, under the great John of Austria, with the loss of an arm, and a long slavery in Algiers; Lope de Vega, among other things, survived the misfortunes of the invincible flotilla; Calderon performed campaigns in Flanders and Italy, fulfilled his warlike duties as a knight of Santiago till he entered into holy orders, and thus gave external evidence that religion was the ruling motive of his life.

If the feeling of religion, true heroism, honour, and love, are the foundation of the romantic poetry, born and grown up in Spain under such auspices, it could not fail to assume the highest elevation. The fancy of the Spaniards was bold like their active powers, no mental adventure seemed too dangerous for it. The

predilection of the people for the most extravagantly wonderful had already been shown in the chivalry romances. They wished to see the wonderful once more upon the stage; and when their poets, standing on a high eminence of cultivation in art and social life, gave it the requisite form, breathed into it a musical soul, and wholly purified it from corporeal grossness to colour and fragrance, there arises, from the very contrast of the subject and the form, an irresistible fascination. Their spectators imagined they perceived a refulgence of the world-conquering greatness of their nation, now half lost, when all the harmony of the most varied metre, all the elegance of fanciful allusion, all the splendour of imagery and comparison which their language alone could afford, were poured out into inventions always new, and almost always pre-eminently distinguished for their ingenuity.—The treasures of the most distant zones were procured in fancy, as well as reality, for the gratification of the mother country, and we may say that in the dominion of this poetry, as in that of Charles the Fifth, the sun never set. \

Even those plays of Calderon in modern manners, which descend the most to the tone of common life, still fascinate us by a sort of fanciful magic, and cannot be considered altogether in the light of comedies in the usual acceptance of the word. We have seen that the comedies of Shakspeare are always composed of two parts, foreign to each other: the comic, which is true to English manners, as comic imitation requires local determination; and the romantic, transported to some southern scene, as the native soil was not sufficiently poetical for that purpose. In Spain again the national costume of that day was susceptible of being still exhibited in an ideal manner. This could not indeed have been possible, had Calderon introduced us into the interior of domestic life, where want and habit generally reduce all things to everyday narrowness. The comedies end like those of the ancients, with marriages; but how different what precedes! There, for the gratification of sensual passions and selfish views, the most immoral means are often put in motion, human beings stand opposed to each other with their mental powers as mere physical beings, and endeavour to pry into their mutual weaknesses. Calderon represents to us his principal characters of both sexes in the first ebullitions of youth, it is true; but the aim after which they strive, and in the prosecution of which everything else kicks the beam, is never confounded in their mind with any other good. Honour, love, and jealousy, are uniformly the motives; the plot arises out of their daring but noble collision, and is not purposely instigated by knavish deception. Honour is always an ideal principle; for it rests, as I have elsewhere shown, on

that high morality which consecrates principles without regard to consequences. It may sink down to a mere social coincidence with certain opinions or prejudices, to a mere instrument of vanity, but even when so disfigured we may still recognize in it the shadow of a sublime idea. I know no apter symbol of the manner in which the tender sensibility of honour is portrayed by Calderon, than the fabulous story of the ermine, which sets such high value on the whiteness of its skin, that rather than stain it, on being pursued by the hunters, it yields itself up to destruction. This feeling for honour is equally powerful in the female characters; it rules over love, which is only allowed a place beside it, but not above it. The honour of the women consists, according to the manner of thinking of the dramas of Calderon, in loving only one man of pure and unspotted honour, and loving him with perfect purity, in entertaining no sort of ambiguous devotion, which approaches within too great nearness of the most severe female dignity. Love requires inviolable secrecy till a lawful union permits it to be publicly declared. This secrecy secures it from the poisonous intermixture of vanity, which would boast of pretensions or conceded favours; it gives it the appearance of a vow, which from its mystery is the more sacredly observed. In this morality, it is true, cunning and dissimulation are allowed for the sake of love, and in so far honour may be said to be infringed on; but the most delicate regards are notwithstanding observed in the collision with other duties; with those of friendship for example. The power of jealousy, always alive and often breaking out in a dreadful manner, not like that of eastern countries, a jealousy of possession, but of the slightest emotions of the heart and its most imperceptible demonstrations, serves to ennoble love, as this feeling when it is not altogether exclusive sinks beneath itself. The perplexity to which the collision of all these mental motives gives rise frequently ends in nothing, and then the catastrophe is truly comic; sometimes, however, it takes a tragic turn, and then honour becomes a hostile destiny for him who cannot satisfy it without either annihilating his own felicity or becoming even a criminal.

This is the higher spirit of the dramas, which by foreigners are called pieces of intrigue; in Spanish, they are called from the dress in which they are acted, comedies of cloak and sword (*Comedias de capa y espada*). They have commonly no other burlesque part than the character of a merry servant, known by the name of the *Gracioso*. This servant chiefly serves to parody the ideal motives from which his master acts, and this he frequently does in the most elegant and witty manner. He is seldom used as an efficient lever to establish by his artifices the in-

trigue, in which we rather admire the wit of accident than of contrivance. Other pieces are called *Comedias de figuron*; the remaining figures are usually the same with those in the former class, only there is always one drawn in caricature which occupies a prominent place in the composition. We cannot refuse the name of pieces of character to many of the dramas of Calderon, although we must not expect the most delicate characterization from the poets of a nation in which the violence of passion and an exalted fancy neither leave sufficient leisure nor sufficient coldness of blood for the designs of prying observation.

Another class of his pieces is called by Calderon himself, festal dramas (*fiestas*). They were destined for representation at court on solemn occasions; and though they require the theatrical pomp of frequent change of decoration and visible wonders, and though music is also often introduced into them, still we may call them poetical operas, that is, dramas which, by the mere splendour of poetry, perform what in the opera can only be attained by the machinery, the music, and the dancing. Here the poet gives himself wholly up to the boldest flight of his fancy, and his creation hardly touches the earth.

His mind, however, is most distinctly expressed in the religious subjects which he handled. He paints love with general features merely, he speaks her technical poetical language. Religion is his peculiar love, the heart of his heart. For religion alone he excites the most overpowering emotions, which penetrate into the inmost recesses of the soul. It would rather appear that he did not wish to enter with the same fervour into worldly events. However turbid they may be in themselves, from the religious medium through which he views them, they appear to him perfectly bright. This fortunate man escaped from the wild labyrinths of doubt into the citadel of belief, from whence he viewed and portrayed the storms of the world with undisturbed tranquillity of soul; human life was to him no longer a dark riddle. Even his tears reflect the image of heaven, like dew-drops on a flower in the sun. His poetry, whatever its object may apparently be, is an incessant hymn of joy on the majesty of the creation: he celebrates the productions of nature and human art with an astonishment always joyful and always new, as if he saw them for the first time in an unworn festal splendour. It is the first waking of Adam, coupled with an eloquence and skill of expression, with a thorough acquaintance with the most mysterious relations of nature, such as high mental cultivation and mature contemplation can alone give. When he compares the most remote, the greatest and the smallest, stars and flowers, the sense of all his metaphors is the mutual attraction of created

things to one another on account of their common origin, and this delightful harmony and unity of the world is again with him merely a refulgence of the eternal love which embraces the universe.

Calderon still flourished at a time when a strong inclination began to manifest itself in the other countries of Europe, to that mannerism of taste in the arts, and those prosaic views in literature, which in the eighteenth century obtained such universal dominion. He is consequently to be considered as the last summit of the romantic poetry. All its magnificence is lavished in his works, as in fireworks, the most gaudy colours, the most dazzling cascades and circles, are usually reserved for the last explosion.

The Spanish theatre continued to be cultivated in the same sense, for nearly a generation after Calderon. All, however, which was produced in that time may be considered as a mere echo of the preceding productions, and nothing new and truly peculiar appeared, which deserves to be named after Calderon. A great barrenness is afterwards perceptible. Single attempts have been made to produce regular tragedies, that is to say, after the French cut. Even the declamatory drama of Diderot has found its imitators. I recollect having read a Spanish play, the object of which was to recommend the abolition of the torture. The exhilaration to be expected from such a work may be easily conceived. Those Spaniards who are runaways from their old national taste extol highly the prosaic and moral dramas of Moratin; but we see no reason for seeking in Spain what we have as good, or, more correctly speaking, equally bad at home. The majority of the spectators have preserved themselves tolerably exempt from these foreign influences; when a *bel esprit* undertook a number of years ago to reduce a justly admired piece of Moreto (*El parecido en la corte*) to a conformity with the three unities, the pit at Madrid were thrown into such a commotion that the players could only appease them by announcing the piece for the next day in its genuine shape.

When external circumstances, for instance, the influence of the clergy, the oppression of the censure, and even the jealous vigilance of the people for the preservation of their old manners, oppose in any country the introduction of what passes in neighbouring states for a progress in mental cultivation, it frequently happens that the better description of heads will entertain an undue longing for the forbidden fruit, and that they first begin to admire some depravity in art, when it has elsewhere ceased to be fashionable. Certain mental maladies are so epidemical in an age, that a nation never can be secure from infection till it has

once been inoculated. However, the Spaniards it would appear, with respect to the passive illumination of the last generation, have come off with the chicken pox, while the disfiguring variolous scars are but too visible in the features of other nations. Living nearly in an insular situation, they have slept the eighteenth century, and how could they in the main have applied their time better? Should the Spanish poetry again awake in old Europe, or in the other hemisphere, it would certainly have a step to make, from instinct to consciousness. What the Spaniards have hitherto loved from native inclination, they must learn to reverence on clear principles, and, unconcerned at the criticism which has in the interval sprung up, proceed to fresh creations in the spirit of their great poets.

LECTURE XV.

Origin of the German theatre.—Hans Sachs.—Gryphius.—The age of Gottsched.—Wretched imitation of the French.—Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller.—Review of their works.—Their influence on chivalrous dramas, affecting dramas, and family pictures.—Prospects for futurity.

IN its cultivated state, the German theatre is much younger than any of those of which we have already spoken, and we are not therefore to wonder, if the store of our literature in valuable original works, in this department, is also much more scanty.

Little more than half a century ago, the German literature was at the very lowest ebb in point of talent, and since that time when greater exertions first began to be made, the Germans have proceeded with gigantic strides. If the dramatic art has not been cultivated with the same success, and I may add with the same zeal, as other departments, the cause must rather perhaps be attributed to a number of unfavourable circumstances than to any want of talents.

The rude beginnings of the stage with us are as old as in other countries.* The oldest drama which we have in writing is the production of one Hans Rosenpluet, a native of Nuremberg, about the middle of the fifteenth century. He was followed by two fruitful writers born in the same imperial city, Hans Sachs and Ayrer. In the works of Hans Sachs we find a great multitude of tragedies, comedies, spiritual and temporal histories, where the prologue and epilogue are always spoken by the herald, besides merry carnival plays. The above, it appears, were all acted, not by players, but by respectable citizens, as an allowable relaxation for the mind, without any theatrical apparatus. The carnival plays are somewhat coarse, but not unfrequently extremely droll, as the jokes in general are; they often run into the wildest farce, and, inspired by mirth and drollery, leave the bounds of the world of reality behind them. The composition in all these plays is respectable, and does not contain many circumlocutions: all the characters, from God the Father downwards, state at once in clear terms what they have at heart, and the reasons for which

* The first mention of the mysteries or spiritual representations in Germany, with which I am acquainted, is to be found in the *Eulen-spiegel*. We may see this merry, but somewhat disgusting trick, of the celebrated buffoon, in the 13th History; "How Eulen-spiegel made a play in the Easter fair, in which the priest and his maid-servant fought with the boors." Eulen-spiegel is stated to have lived towards the middle of the fourteenth century, but the book cannot be placed farther back than the beginning of the fifteenth.

they make their appearance; they resemble those figures in old pictures who have written labels in their mouths, to assist the defective expression of the attitudes. The form approaches most to what was elsewhere called moralities; allegorical personages frequently appear. The sketch of the dramatic art, yet in its infancy, is feebly but not falsely drawn; and if we had only proceeded in the same path, we should have produced something better and more characteristic than the fruits of the seventeenth century.

In the first half of this century, poetry left the circle of common life to which it had so long been confined, and fell into the hands of the learned. Opiz, who may be considered as the founder of its modern form, translated several tragedies from the ancients into verse, and composed pastoral operas after the manner of the Italians; but I know not whether he wrote anything expressly for the stage. He was followed by Andreas Gryphius, who may be styled our first dramatic writer. He possessed a certain extent of literary knowledge in his department, as is proved by several of his imitations and translations; a piece from the French, one from the Italian, a tragedy from the Flemish of Vondel; lastly, a farce called *Peter Squenz*, an extension of the burlesque tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe, in *The Midsummer Night's Dream* of Shakspeare. The latter was then almost unknown beyond his own island; the learned Morhof, who wrote in the last half of the seventeenth century, confesses that he had never seen Shakspeare's works, though he was very well acquainted with Ben Jonson. Even about the middle of last century, a writer of estimation in those days, and not without merit, has in one of his treatises instituted a comparison between Shakspeare and Andreas Gryphius; the whole resemblance consisted in this, that Gryphius was also fond of calling up the spirits of the departed. He seems rather to have had Vondel, the Fleming, before his eyes, a writer still highly celebrated by his countrymen, and universally called by them, the great Vondel, while Gryphius himself has been consigned to oblivion. Unfortunately the metre in the plays of Gryphius is the Alexandrine; the form, however, is not so confined as that of the French at an after period; the scene sometimes changes, and the interludes, partly musical, partly allegorical, bear some resemblance to the English masks. In other respects he possesses little theatrical skill, and I do not even know if these pieces were ever actually brought on the stage. The tragedies of Lohenstein, who may be styled the Marino of our literature of that day, resemble those of Gryphius in their cut, but without mentioning their other faults, they are of such an immeasurable length as to set all representation at defiance.

The pitiful condition of the theatre in Germany at the end of the seventeenth and during the first third part of the eighteenth century, wherever there was any other stage than that of puppet-shows and mountebanks, exactly corresponded to that of the other departments of our literature. We have a standard for this wretchedness, when we consider that Gottsched could pass for the restorer of our literature; Gottsched, whose writings resemble a watery beverage, such as was then usually recommended to patients in a state of convalescence, from an idea that they could bear nothing stronger, by which means their stomach became still more enfeebled. Gottsched, among his other labours, composed a great deal for the theatre; connected with a certain Madame Neuber, who was at the head of a company of players in Leipzig, he discarded Punch (Hanswurst), and they buried him solemnly with great triumph. I am willing to believe that the parts of Punch, of which we may even yet form a judgment from puppet-shows, were not always ingeniously filled up extemporarily, and that many flat things might occasionally be uttered by him; but still Punch had undoubtedly more sense in his little finger, than Gottsched in his whole body. Punch, as an allegorical personage, is immortal; and however strong the belief of his burial may be, he yet pops unexpectedly upon us in some grave office-bearer or other almost every day.

Gottsched and his school now inundated the German theatre, which was hereafter to be regular by means of insipid and diffuse translations from the French. Heads of a better description began to labour for the stage; but instead of producing real original works, they brought forth only wretched imitations; and the reputation of the French theatre was so great that the most contemptible mannerism was as much laid hold of as the fruits of a better taste. Thus, for example, *Gellert* still composed pastoral plays after bad French models, in which shepherds and shepherdesses, with rose red and apple green ribands, uttered all manner of insipid compliments to one another.

Besides the French comedies, those translated from the Danish of *Holberg*, were acted with great applause. This writer has certainly great merit. His pictures of manners possess great local truth; his exhibition of depravity, folly, and stupidity, rest on an extremely good foundation; in strength of comic motives and situations he is not defective; he is merely not very inventive in his intrigues. The execution runs too much out into breadth. The Danes speak in the highest terms of the delicacy of his jokes in their own language; the vulgarity of his tone is revolting to our present taste, but in the low sphere in which he moves, and in which there are incessant storms of cudgellings, it may be na-

tural enough. Attempts have lately been made to revive him, but seldom with any great success. As his principal merit consists in his characterization, which is certainly somewhat caricatured, he requires good comic actors to appear with any advantage.

A few of the plays of that time, in the manners of our own country, by *Gellert* and *Elias Schlegel*, are not without merit; only they have this error, that in drawing folly and stupidity the same wearisomeness has crept into their picture which accompanies them in real life.

In tragedies, properly so called, after French models, the first who were in any degree successful were *Elias Schlegel*, and afterwards *Cronenk* and *Weisse*. I know not whether their labours, if translated into good French verse, would appear as frigid to us as they do in German. It is insufferable to us to read verses of an ell long, in which the style seldom rises above watery prose; the truly poetical expression was first created in German at a subsequent period. The Alexandrine, which in no language, can be a good metre, is doubly stiff and heavy in ours. *Gottler*, long after our poetry had again begun to take a higher flight, in the translation of French tragedies, made the last attempt to ennoble the Alexandrine and procure its re-admission into tragedy, and proved, as it appears to me by his example, that we must for ever renounce every such idea. It serves admirably, however, for a parody of the stilted style of false tragical emphasis; its use, too, is much to be recommended in comedy, especially in small after-pieces. Those earlier tragedies, after the French cut, which however met with uncommon applause in their day, show how little hope we can have of the progress of art in the way of slavish imitation. Even a form, narrow in itself, when it has been established under the influence of a national way of thinking, has still some signification; but when it is blindly taken on trust in other countries, it becomes altogether a Spanish mantle.

Thus bad translations of French comedies, with pieces from Holberg, and afterwards Goldoni, and with a few German imitations of a feeble nature, and without any peculiar spirit, constituted the whole repertory of our stage, till at last Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller, successively appeared and redeemed the German theatre from its long continued mediocrity.

Lessing, however, in his earlier dramatic labours, paid the tribute due to his age. His youthful comedies are rather insignificant; they do not yet announce the distinguished head who was to form an epoch in so many departments. He sketched several tragedies according to the French rules, and executed several scenes in Alexandrines, but he finished none: it would appear that he could not manage so difficult a verse with the re-

quisite ease. Even his *Miss Sara Sampson* is a familiar tragedy in the lacrymose and creeping style, in which we evidently perceive that he had the *Merchant of London* before his eyes as a model. In the year 1767, his connexion with a company of actors in Hamburg, and a periodical paper dedicated to theatrical criticism, which he conducted, gave him an opportunity of entering more closely into the consideration of the theatre. He displayed in this paper great wit and acuteness, his bold, nay, considering the opinion which was then prevalent, hazardous attacks, were particularly triumphant over the dominion of the French taste in the tragical department, which had merely been forced upon us. His labours were attended with such success, that, shortly after the publication of his *Dramaturgie*, the translations of French tragedies, and the German tragedies modelled after them, disappeared from the stage. He was the first who spoke with warmth of Shakspeare, and paved the way for his appearance. But his belief in Aristotle, with the influence which Diderot's writings had had on him, produced a singular mixture in his theory of the dramatic art. He was unacquainted with the rights of poetical imitation, and wished in dialogue, as well as everything else, a naked copy of nature, as if this was, in general, allowable or even possible in the fine arts. His attack of the Alexandrine was just, but he wished to abolish all versification, and in this indeed he was but too successful; for it is to him that we have to impute the incredible falling off of our players in the getting by heart and delivering of verse. Even yet they cannot habituate themselves to it. He was thus mediately the cause of the insipid affectation of nature of our dramatic writers, which the general use of versification would, in some degree, have restrained.

Lessing, by his own confession, was no poet, and in his riper years, he produced merely a few dramatic works with great labour. *Minna von Barnhelm* is a true comedy of the more refined description; in point of form it holds a middle place between the French and English manner; the spirit of the invention however, the social tone portrayed in it, are peculiarly German. Everything is even locally determined; and the allusions to the memorable circumstances of the seven years' war contributed not a little to the extraordinary success which this comedy at that time obtained. The serious part is not free from affectation in the expression of feeling, and the relation of the two lovers is brought forward even to a painful degree. The comic secondary figures are drawn with much drollery and humour, and bear a genuine German stamp.

Emilia Galotti obtained still more admiration than *Minna*

von *Barnhelm*, but I know not whether altogether justly. The former is perhaps planned with more consideration, and executed with still greater diligence than the other; but *Minna von Barnhelm* answers better to the genuine idea of comedy than *Emilia Galotti* to that of tragedy. Lessing's theory of the dramatic art had, as we may easily conceive, a much less prejudicial influence on a demi-prosaical species than upon one which inevitably sinks beneath itself, when it does not take the highest flight. He was now too well acquainted with the world to fall again into the drawling lacrymose and sermonizing tone which prevails throughout *Miss Sara Sampson*. On the other hand, his sound sense, notwithstanding all his admiration of Diderot, preserved him from his declamatory and emphatical style, which owes its chief effect to marks of interrogation and hyphens. But as he resolutely rejected all poetical elevation of dialogue, he could not escape this manner without falling into another. He introduced the cool and prying observation of the comic writer into the region of tragedy; the passions in *Emilia Galotti* are rather acutely and wittily characterized than eloquently expressed. In the belief that the drama is most powerful when it exhibits faithful copies of what we know and what is near to us, Lessing has disguised an old and celebrated deed of rough Roman virtue indelibly entered in the history of the world, the murder of Virginia by her father, under fictitious names, in modern European relations, and in the manners of the present times. Virginia was converted into a countess Galotti, Virginius into Count Odoardo; an Italian Prince took place of Appius Claudius, and a chamberlain that of the unblushing minister of his lust, &c. It is not properly a familiar tragedy, but a court tragedy in the conversational tone, to some parts of which the sword of state and the hat under the arm as essentially belong as to many French tragedies. Lessing wished to transplant the inevitable violence of the tyrannical Decemvir into the unrenowned circle of the principality of Massa Carara; but as by taking a few steps we can extricate ourselves from so petty a territory, we in like manner, after a slight consideration, escape with the greatest ease from the assumption so laboriously planned by the poet; on which, however, the necessity of the catastrophe wholly rests. The visible care which has been taken to assign a motive for everything invites to a closer investigation, in which we are interrupted by none of the magical illusions of imagination: and this is an investigation which the internal unconnectedness of a drama, in the outward structure of which such an uncommon degree of understanding has been displayed, cannot possibly bear.

It is singular enough, that of all the dramatical works of Lessing, the last, *Nathan der Weise*, which he merely wrote with a view, as he says, to laugh at theologists, when his zeal for the improvement of the German theatre had pretty much cooled, should yet be the most conform to the genuine rules of art. A remarkable tale of Boccaccio is wrought up with a number of inventions which are wonderful, but yet not improbable, when we consider the circumstances of the time; the fictitious persons are grouped round a celebrated historical character, the great Saladin, who is drawn with historical truth; the crusades in the back ground, the scene at Jerusalem, the meeting of persons of various nations and religions on this oriental soil,—all this gives to the work a romantic air, with which the thoughts, foreign to the age in question, that the poet has allowed himself to intersperse for the sake of his philosophical views, form a contrast somewhat hazardous indeed, but yet exceedingly attractive. The form is more free and comprehensive than in the other pieces of Lessing; it is nearly that of a drama of Shakespeare. He has here returned to the use of versification, which he had formerly rejected; not indeed the Alexandrine; for the discarding of which in the serious drama we are in every respect indebted to him, but the rhymeless Iambic. In *Nathan* the versification is often hard and carelessly laboured; but it is truly dialogical, and its advantageous influence may be easily traced when we compare the tone of this piece with the prose of the others. Had the developement of the truths which Lessing had particularly at heart not required too much repose, had there been more rapidity of motion in the action, the piece would also have been calculated to please on the stage. That Lessing, although he possessed so independent a mind, still allowed himself in his dramatical principles to be in some measure overcome by the general inclination of the age, I infer from this, that the number of imitators of *Nathan* were very few when compared with those of *Emilia Galotti*. Among the striking imitations of the style of the latter I will merely mention *Julius von Tarent*.

Engel must be considered as a scholar of Lessing. His small afterpieces in the manner of Lessing are altogether insignificant; but his treatise on imitation (*Mimik*) shows the point to which the theory of his master leads. This book contains many useful observations on the first elements of the language of gesture: the grand error of the author was, that he considered it a complete system of mimicry or imitation, though it only treats of the expression of the passions, and does not contain a syllable on the subject of exhibition of character. Moreover, in his histrionic art

he does not allow the least place for the idea of the tragic and comic; and it may easily be supposed that he rejects ideality of every kind,* and merely requires a bare copy of nature.

The more I draw near to the present times the more I wish to give my observations a general direction, and to avoid entering into a minute criticism of works of living writers with part of whom I have been, or still am, in relations of friendship or hostility. I may yet, however, speak of the dramatic career of Goethe and Schiller, two men of whom our nation is proud, and whose intimate society has frequently enabled me to correct and enlarge my own ideas of art, with that frankness which is worthy of their great and disinterested endeavours. The errors which they occasioned at first when under the influence of erroneous principles, while they always continued to advance towards greater purity and brightness, are partly sunk already in oblivion, or will soon be so; their works will remain; in them we have at least the foundation of a dramatic school at once peculiarly German, and regulated by genuine principles of art.

Scarcely had Goethe, in *Werther*, given as it were a declaration of the rights of feeling in opposition to the constraint of social relations, when he protested in *Götz von Berlichingen*, by the example which he there set, against all the restraints of arbitrary rules by which dramatic poetry had been narrowed. In this play we do not see an imitation of Shakspeare, but the inspiration excited in a kindred mind by a creative genius. In the dialogue he practised Lessing's principles of nature, only with greater boldness; for besides the versification and all heightening ornaments, he also rejected the laws of written language to a degree of which we had had no former example. He wished to have no poetical circumlocution whatever; the exhibition was to be the very thing itself; and he thus allowed us to hear the tone of a remote age in a manner carrying with it a sufficient degree of illusion, at least for those who were unacquainted with the historical monuments in which our ancestors themselves speak. He has expressed the old German cordiality in the most moving manner: the situations which are announced in a few strokes are

* Among other things, Engel says, that as the language of Euripides, the latest, and in his opinion the most perfect Greek tragedian, has less elevation than that of his predecessors, it is probable, if the Greeks had carried tragedy to still higher perfection, that they would have proceeded a step farther, and dismissed verse altogether. So completely ignorant was Engel of the spirit of Grecian art. The approach which may certainly be traced in Euripides to the tone of common life is the very indication of the decline and impending destruction of tragedy: but even in comedy the Greeks never could bring themselves to make use of prose.

irresistibly powerful; the whole has a great historical sense, for it represents the conflict between a departing and a commencing age; between the century of rude but powerful independence, and the succeeding one of political tameness. The poet, in this composition, never seems to have had the representation on the stage in his eye; he rather indeed seems, in his youthful arrogance, to have set its insufficiency at defiance.

It seems, in general, to have been the grand object of Goethe to express his genius in his works, and to give new poetical animation to his age; he was indifferent as to the form, though he generally preferred the dramatic. He was at the same time a warm friend of the theatre, and sometimes laboured to comply with its wants as determined by custom and the taste of the time; as, for instance, in *Clavigo*, where he gave a familiar tragedy in the manner of Lessing. Among the other defects of this piece, the fifth act does not correspond with the others. In the four first acts Goethe adhered pretty closely to the relation of *Beaumarchais*, but he invented the catastrophe; and when we observe that it puts us strongly in mind of the burial of Ophelia, and the meeting of Hamlet and Laertes beside her grave, we have sufficiently expressed what a strong contrast it forms to the tone and colouring of the rest. In *Stella* Goethe took nearly the same liberty with the story of *Count von Gleichen* which Lessing did with that of *Virginia*, but his labours were still more unsuccessful: the trait of the times of the crusades on which he founded his play is affecting, true-hearted, and even edifying; but *Stella* can only flatter the sentimentality of exhausted feeling.

At an after period he endeavoured to effect a reconciliation between his views of art and the common dramatic forms, even the subordinate, almost all of which he run through with single attempts. In his *Iphigenia* he expressed the spirit of the antique tragedy, according to his conceptions of it, especially with relation to repose, perspicuity, and ideality. With the same simplicity, flexibility, and noble elegance, he composed his *Tasso*, in which he applied a historical anecdote to mark the general signification of the contrast between a court and a poetical life. His *Egmont* again is a romantic and historical drama, the style of which steers a middle course between his first manner in *Götz*, and the form of Shakspeare. *Erwin und Elmire* and *Claudine von Villabella*, if I may say so, are ideal operettes, breathed out so lightly and airily that, with musical accompaniment and representation, they only run the risk of becoming heavy and prosaical; in this piece the noble and sustained style of the dialogue of his *Tasso*, is varied by the most tender songs. *Jery und Bätely* is a charming natural picture of Swiss manners and in the

spirit and form of the best French operettes; *Scherz List und Rache* again is a true *opera buffa*, full of Italian *Lazzi*. *Die Mitschuldigen* is a comedy in rhyme, in the manners of common life, according to the French rules. Goethe carried his condescension so far, that he even gave a continuation of an after-piece of Florian; and the impartiality of his taste, so far, that he translated several tragedies of Voltaire for the German stage. Goethe's words and rhythm have always a golden resonance, but we cannot extol these pieces as successful translations; and indeed it would be matter of regret if that had succeeded which ought never to have been undertaken. It is not necessary to call in the aid of the *Dramaturgie* of Lessing to banish these unprofitable productions from the German soil; Goethe's own masterly parody of the French tragedy, in some scenes of *Esther*, will do this much more amusingly and effectually.

Der Triumph der Empfindsamkeit (The Triumph of Sentimentality) is a highly ingenious satire of Goethe's own imitators, and inclines to the arbitrary comic, and the fancifully symbolical of Aristophanes, but the modest Aristophanes in good company and at court. At a much earlier period Goethe had, in some of his merry tales and carnival plays, completely appropriated to himself the manner of our honest Hans Sachs.

We always recognize, in the whole of these transformations, the same free and powerful poetical spirit, to which we may safely apply the Homeric lines respecting Proteus:

Ἄλλ' ἦτοι πρωτιστα λέων γένετ' ἡυγένειος—
Γένετο δ' ὑγρόν ὕδωρ, καὶ δένδρεον ὑψιπέτηλον.

Oydas. lib. iv.

A lion now, he curls a surgy mane;
Here from our strict embrace a stream he glides,
And last, sublime his stately growth he rears,
A tree, and well dissembled foliage wears.

POPE.*

To the youthful epoch belongs his *Faust*, a work which was early planned, though it did not appear till a late period, and

* I have here quoted the translation of Pope, though nothing can well be more vapid and more unlike the original, which is literally, "First he became a lion with a huge mane—and then flowing water; and a tree with lofty foliage."—It would not perhaps be advisable to recur to our earliest mode of classical translation, line for line, and nearly word for word; but when German literature shall be better known in England, it will be seen from the masterly versions of Voss and Schlegel, that without diluting by idle epithets one line into three, as in the above example, it is still possible to combine fidelity with spirit. The German translation quoted by Mr. Schlegel runs,

Erstlich ward er ein Leu mit fürchterlich rollender Mahne,
Floss dann als Wasser dahin, und rauscht' als Baum in den Wolken.

TRANS.

which even in its latest shape is still a fragment, and from its very nature perhaps, it must always remain a fragment. It is hard to say whether we are here most lost in astonishment at the elevation which the poet frequently reaches, or seized with giddiness at the depths which he lays open to our sight. But this is not the place to express the whole of our admiration of this labyrinthical and boundless work, the peculiar creation of Goethe; we have merely to consider it in a dramatic point of view. The wonderful and popular story of Faustus is a subject peculiarly adapted for the theatre; and the *Marionette* play, from which Goethe, after Lessing,* took the first idea of a drama, satisfies our expectations even in the mutilated scenes and meager words of ignorant puppet-show men. Goethe's work, which adheres in some points closely to the tradition, but which leaves it altogether in others, runs purposely out in all directions, beyond the dimensions of the theatre. Many scenes are standing delineations in long monologues, or conversations of Faustus's internal conditions, and dispositions, developments of his thoughts on the insufficiency of human knowledge, and the unsatisfactory lot of human nature; other scenes, though extremely ingenious and significant in themselves, possess, with respect to the progress of the action, an accidental appearance; many again, though very theatrically conceived, are merely slightly sketched: there are rhapsodical fragments without beginning and end, in which the poet allows us a surprising prospect, and then the curtain immediately drops; whereas in a dramatic poem, which is to carry the spectators along with it, the separate parts ought to be fashioned after the figure of the whole, so that we may say each scene has its exposition, its intrigue and winding up. Some scenes, full of the highest energy and overpowering pathos, for example, the murder of Valentine and Gretchen, and Faustus in the dungeon, prove that the poet was a complete master of popular effect, and that he merely sacrificed it for the sake of more comprehensive views. He makes frequent calls on the imagination of his readers; nay, he compels them to supply immense movable pictures, and such as no theatrical art is capable of bringing before the eye, by way of back ground for his flying groups. To represent the *Faustus* of Goethe, we must possess Faustus's magic staff, and his formulæ of conjuration. With such an incapability of external exhibition, an astonishing deal is to be

* Lessing has borrowed the only scenes of his plan which he communicates, namely where Faustus summons the evil spirits to select the quickest of them for his service, from the old piece which bears the showy title: *Infelix Prudentia*, or *Doctor Johannes Faustus*. Marlow had already composed a *Faustus* in England but unfortunately it has not been printed in Dodsley's Collection.

learned from this wonderful work, both in respect of plan and execution. In a prologue which was probably composed at a late period, the poet declares why, true to his genius, he could not accommodate himself to the demands of a mixed multitude of spectators, and writes in some measure a farewell letter to the theatre.

We are forced to allow that Goethe possesses the dramatic talent in a very high degree, but not so much theatrical talent. He is much more anxious to effect his object by tender development than by rapid external motion; even the mild grace of his harmonious mind withheld him from endeavouring after a strong demagogical effect. *Iphigenia auf (in) Tauris* possesses, it is true, more affinity to the Grecian spirit, than perhaps any other work of the moderns composed before his time; but it is not so much an antique tragedy as a reflected image of it, a musical echo: its violent catastrophes appear here in the distance only as recollections, and everything is mildly resolved in the interior of the mind. The strongest and most overpowering pathos is to be found in *Egmont*, but the conclusion of this tragedy is altogether removed from the external world into the province of an ideal music of the soul.

That Goethe, with this direction of his poetical career to the purest expression of his inspiration without any other regard, and on the part of art to a universality of studies, should not have had that decided influence on the shape of our theatre which he might have possessed, if he had actually chosen to dedicate himself exclusively and immediately to it, we may very easily conceive.

In the mean time, shortly after the first appearance of Goethe, the attempt to bring Shakspeare on our stage had been made. The effort was extraordinarily great. Actors who are still alive acquired the first wreaths of their renown in these exhibitions of a kind altogether new, and Schröder attained, perhaps, in some of the most celebrated tragic and comic parts, the same perfection for which Garrick had been idolized. The pieces, as wholes, appeared however in a very imperfect shape; in cumbersome prose translations, and frequently in mere extracts, with disfiguring alterations. The separate characters and situations had been to a certain degree hit, but by no means the sense of his composition.

Under these circumstances *Schiller* made his appearance, a man endowed with all the qualities for producing at once a strong effect on the multitude, and on minds of a nobler description. He composed his earliest works while yet very young, and unacquainted with that world which he undertook to draw; and although a genius independent and bold even to daringness, he

was however in various ways influenced by the models of Lessing, which we have mentioned, by the earlier labours of Goethe, and Shakspeare in so far as he could understand him without an acquaintance with the original.

In this way were the works of his youth produced: *Die Räuber* ('The Robbers'), *Cabale und Liebe*, and *Fiesco*. The first, wild and horrible as it was, produced such a powerful effect as even wholly to turn the heads of youthful enthusiasts. The defective imitation of Shakspeare is not to be mistaken: Francis Moor is a prosaical Richard the Third, ennobled by none of the properties which in the latter unite admiration with aversion. *Cabale und Liebe* can hardly affect us by its extravagant sentimentality, but it tortures us by the most painful impressions. *Fiesco* is in design the most perverted, in effect the feeblest.

So noble a mind could not long persevere in such errors, though they acquired him an applause which would have rendered the continuance of his blindness excusable. He had himself experienced the dangers of rudeness and an ungovernable defiance of all moderating discipline, and threw himself therefore, with incredible efforts and a sort of passion, into cultivation. The work which marks this new epoch is *Don Carlos*. In parts we may observe a great depth in the delineation of character; yet the old and tumid extravagance was not altogether lost, but merely clothed with choicer forms. The situations have a great deal of pathetic power, the plot is complicated even to epigrammatic subtlety; but his dear won thoughts on human nature and social institutions were of such value in the eyes of the poet, that he exhibited them with circumstantial fulness, instead of expressing them by the progress of the action, and made his characters philosophize more or less on the subject of themselves and others, by which means his work swelled to a size altogether incompatible with the prescribed limits of the theatre.

Historical and philosophical studies seemed now to have seduced the poet for a time from the poetical career for the advantage of his art, to which he returned with a ripe mind, enriched with various knowledge, and at last truly enlightened with respect to his objects and his means. He applied himself now wholly to historical tragedy, and endeavoured, by divesting himself of his personality, to rise to truly objective exhibitions. In *Wallenstein* he had so conscientiously endeavoured to adhere to historical truth, that he could not become altogether the master of his materials, and an event of no great historical extent was spun out into two plays, and a prologue in some degree didactical. In the forms he adhered very closely to Shakspeare, only

he endeavoured to confine the change of place and time within narrower limits, that he might not make too great a call on the imagination of the spectators. He tied himself also down to a more sustained tragical dignity, brought forward no persons of mean condition, or at least did not allow them to speak in their natural tone, and banished into the prelude the people, here the army, which Shakspeare has introduced with such life and truth into the course of public events. The love between Thekla and Max Piccolomini is properly an episode, it is true, and bears the stamp of an age quite different from that delineated in the rest of the work; but it affords an opportunity for the most affecting scenes, and is conceived with equal tenderness and dignity.

Maria Stuart is planned and executed with greater skill in art, and also with greater solidity. All is wisely weighed; we may censure separate parts as offensive, the quarrel for instance between the two queens, the wild fury of Mortimer's passion, &c.; but we shall hardly be able to take anything out of its place without involving the whole in confusion. The effect is infallible; the last scenes of Mary are truly worthy of a queen; religious impressions are introduced with due seriousness; only from the care, perhaps superfluous, of exercising poetical justice on Elizabeth after Mary's death, the spectator is dismissed in a state of mind rather approaching to cool indifference.

With such a wonderful subject as the *Maid of Orleans*, Schiller thought himself entitled to take greater liberties. The plot is looser; the scene with Montgomery, an epic intermixture, is at variance with the general tone; in the singular and inconceivable appearance of the black knight, the object of the poet is ambiguous; in the character of Talbot, and many other parts, Schiller has entered into a competition with Shakspeare without success; and I know not whether the colouring employed, which is not so brilliant as might be imagined, is an equivalent for the severer pathos which has thereby been lost. The history of the *Maid of Orleans* is most accurately vouched; the high mission was believed by herself and generally by her contemporaries, and produced the most extraordinary effects. The wonder might therefore have been represented by the poet, even though the sceptical spirit of his contemporaries should have deterred him from giving it out for real; and the true ignominious martyrdom of the betrayed and abandoned heroine would have agitated us more deeply than the gaudy and rose-coloured one which Schiller has invented for her in contradiction to history. Shakspeare's exhibition, though partial from his national point of view, still possesses much more historical truth and profundity. However,

the German piece will always remain a beautiful attempt to save the honour of a name dishonoured by impudent ridicule; and its dazzling effect, supported by the rich ornaments of the language, deservedly gained for it the most distinguished success on the stage.

I am least disposed to approve of the principles which Schiller followed in *The Bride of Messina*, and which he himself declares in his preface. The investigation, however, would lead me too far into the province of theory. It was intended for a tragedy, antique in its form, but romantic in substance. A story altogether fictitious is kept in a costume so indefinite and so divested of all inward probability, that the picture is neither truly ideal nor truly natural, neither mythological nor historical. The romantic poetry seeks indeed to blend things the most remote from each other into one, but it cannot admit of things which are altogether incompatible with each other; the way of thinking of the people exhibited cannot be at once Pagan and Christian. I will not complain of him for borrowing openly as he has done; the whole is composed of two principal ingredients, of the story of Eteocles and Polynices, who, notwithstanding the mediation of their mother Jocaste, contend for the sole possession of the throne, and of the brothers impelled by jealousy in love to fratricide, in the *Zwillingen von Klinger*, and in *Julius von Tarent*. In the introduction of the chorusses also, though they possess much lyrical sublimity and beautiful passages, the sense of the ancients has been totally mistaken; as to each of the hostile brothers a peculiar chorus is partially attached, the one contending against the other, they both cease to be a true chorus; that is, a voice of sympathy and contemplation elevated above every personal consideration.

The last of Schiller's works, *Wilhelm Tell*, is also in my opinion the best. Here he has wholly returned to the poetry of history; the manner in which he has handled his subject is true, cordial, and when we consider Schiller's ignorance of Swiss nature and manners, wonderful in point of local truth. It is true he had here a noble source to draw from in the speaking pictures of the immortal John Müller. In the view of Tell's chapel on the banks of the lake of Lucerni, in the open air, and with the Alps for a back ground, this picture of heart-elevating, old German manners, piety, and true heroism, might have merited a representation as a solemnization of Swiss freedom, five hundred years after its foundation.

Schiller was in the most mature fulness of his mind when he was carried off by an untimely death; up to the moment of which

his health, which had long been undermined, was always made to yield to his powerful will, and completely exhausted in the most praiseworthy endeavours. How much might he not have still performed, as he dedicated himself exclusively to the theatre, and with every work attained a higher mastery of his art! He was a virtuous artist in the genuine sense of the word; he worshipped the true and the beautiful with purity of mind, and to his indefatigable endeavours to reach them he offered up his own existence as a sacrifice, far from petty self-love, and from the jealousy but too common even among artists of excellence.

The appearance of great original minds in Germany has always been followed by a host of imitators, and hence both Goethe and Schiller have been the occasion, for the most part, not from any fault of their own, of bringing a number of defective and degenerate productions on our stage.

Götz Von Berlichingen was followed by a whole inundation of *chivalrous plays*, in which there was nothing historical but the names and other external circumstances, nothing chivalrous but the helmets, bucklers, and swords, and nothing of old German honesty but the supposed rudeness: the sentiments were as modern as they were vulgar. From chivalry pieces they became true cavalry pieces, which certainly deserve to be acted by horses rather than by men. To those also who in some measure appeal to the imagination by superficial allusions to former times, may be applied what I said of one of the most admired of them:

Mit Harsthörnern, und Burgen, und Harnischen, pranget Johanna;
Traun! mir gefiele das Stack, Waren nicht Worte dabey.*

The next place in the public favour has been held by the *fam-ily picture* and the *affecting drama*, two secondary species, from the encouragement of which by precept and example Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller, (the two last by their earliest compositions *Stella*, *Clavigo*, *Die Geschwister*, *Cubale und Liebe*), cannot be acquitted. I will name no one, but merely suppose that two writers of some talent and theatrical knowledge had dedicated themselves to these species, that they had both mistaken the essence of dramatic poetry, and laid down to themselves a pretended moral aim; but that to the one morality had appeared merely under the confined shape of economy, and to the other in that of sensibility: what sort of fruits would thus be brought forth, and how would the applause of the multitude finally decide between these two competitors?

* Johanna makes a show with horns, castles, and armour;
The piece would certainly please me, were it without words.

The family picture must portray the everyday course of the middle ranks of society. The extraordinary events which are produced by intrigues will be banished: to cover this want of motion the writer will have recourse to a characterization wholly individual, to which a practised player may give a certain truth, but which cleaves to external peculiarities as a bad portrait painter endeavours to attain a resemblance by scars of the small pox and warts, and by the manner of dressing and tying the handkerchief: the motives and situations will sometimes be humorous and droll, but never truly diverting, as the serious and prosaical aim which is always kept in view completely prevents this. The rapid determinations of comedy generally end before the family life begins, by which all is fixed in everyday habits. To make economy poetical is impossible: the dramatic family painter will be able to say as little of a fortunate and tranquil domestic establishment, as the historian of a state in possession of external and internal tranquillity. He will therefore be obliged to interest us by the painful accuracy of his picture of the torments and the penury of domestic life: chagrin experienced in the honest exercise of office, in the education of children, interminable dissensions between husband and wife, the bad conduct of servants, and, above all things, the cares of subsistence. The spectators understand these pictures but too well, for every man knows where the shoe pinches him; it may be very salutary for them, that they should each run over in thought every week, in presence of the stage, the relation between their expenditure and income; but elevation of mind and recreation they will hardly derive there, for they find again on the stage the very same thing which they have at home from morning to night.

The sentimental poet again contrives to lighten their heart. His general doctrine amounts properly to this, that what is called a good heart atones for all errors and extravagances, and that with respect to virtue we are not to insist so strictly on principles. Allow only free scope to your natural impulses, he seems to say to his spectators; see how well it becomes my *naïve* girls, when they confess everything of themselves. If he only knows how to corrupt by means of effeminate emotions, rather sensual than moral, but at the end to make all nearly even, by the introduction of some generous benefactor, who showers out his liberality with open hands, he then pleases the vitiated hearts of his audience in an extraordinary degree; they feel as if they had themselves done noble actions, without however putting their hands in their own pockets: all is drawn from the purse of the generous poet. The affecting species can hardly therefore fail in the long

run to gain a victory over the æconomical; and this has actually been the case in Germany. But what in these dramas is painted to us not only as natural and allowable, but even as moral and dignified, exceeds all imagination, and this seduction is much more dangerous than that of the licentious comedy, for this very reason, that it does not disgust us by external indecency, but steals into unguarded minds, and selects the most sacred names for a disguise.

The poetical as well as moral decline of the taste of the time has been attended with this consequence, that the writers who are the greatest favourites on the stage seek only for a momentary applause, regardless of the opinion of good judges, and of true esteem; those however who have both in higher aims before their eyes cannot prevail on themselves to comply with the demands of the multitude, and when they do compose dramatically, are wholly regardless of the stage. Hence they remain defective in the theatrical part of art, which can only be attained in perfection by practice and experience.

The repertory of our stage exhibits therefore, in its miserable wealth, a motley assemblage of chivalrous pieces, family pictures, and sentimental dramas, which are occasionally, though seldom, varied by works in a grander and more cultivated style by Shakspeare and Schiller. In this state of things translations and imitations of foreign novelties, and especially of the French after-pieces and operettes are indispensable. From the worthlessness of the separate works, the fleeting charm of novelty is alone sought for in theatrical entertainment, to the great injury of the histrionic art, as a number of insignificant parts must be got by heart in the most hurried manner, to be immediately forgotten.*

* To this must be added, by way of rendering the vulgarity of our theatre almost incurable, the radically depraved disposition of every thing having any reference to the theatre. The companies of actors ought to be under the management of intelligent judges and persons practised in the dramatic art, and not themselves players. Engel presided for a time over the Berlin theatre, and eye-witnesses universally assert that he elevated it to an unusual height. What Goethe has effected in the management of the theatre of Weimar, in a small town, and with small means, is known to all good theatrical judges in Germany. Rare talents he can neither create nor reward, but he accustoms the actors to order and discipline, to which they are generally altogether disinclined, and thereby gives to his representations a unity and harmony, which we do not witness on larger theatres, where every individual plays as his own fancy prompts him. The incorrect manner in which their parts are got by heart, and the imperfection of their oral delivery, I have elsewhere censured. I have heard verses mutilated by a celebrated player in a manner which would at Paris be considered unpardonable in a beginner. I know that in a certain theatre, when they were under the melancholy necessity of representing a piece in verse, they wrote out the parts as prose, that the players might not be disturbed

The efforts of the poets who do not labour immediately for the theatre take every variety of direction; in this as in other departments may be observed the fermentation of ideas that has brought on our literature in foreign countries the reproach of a chaotic anarchy, in which however the striving after a higher aim never yet reached is sufficiently visible.

The more profound investigation of *Æsthetics* has among the

in their darling but stupid affectation of nature, by observation of the quantity. How many "periwigged fellows," (as Shakspeare called such people), must we suffer, who imagine they are affording the public an enjoyment when they straddle along the boards with their awkward persons, considering the words which the poet has given them to repeat merely as a necessary evil. Our players are less anxious to please than the French. By the creation of standing national theatres as they are called, by which in several capitals people suppose that they have done something advantageous, and likely to improve the histrionic art, they have on the contrary put a complete end to all competition. They bestow on the players exclusive privileges, they secure their salaries for life; having now nothing to dread from more accomplished rivals, and being independent of the fluctuating favour of the spectators, the only concern of the actors is to enjoy their places like so many benefices in the most convenient manner. Hence the national theatres have become true hospitals for languor and laziness. The question of Hamlet with respect to the players, "Do they grow rusty?" will never become obsolete,—it must alas! be always answered in the affirmative. The actor, from the ambiguous relations in which he lives (which cannot be altered, as they exist in the nature of things), must possess a certain extravagant enthusiasm for his art, if he is to perform anything extraordinary. He cannot be too passionately alive to noisy applause, reputation, and every brilliant reward, derived immediately from his efforts. The present moment is his kingdom, time is his most dangerous enemy, as he can exhibit nothing of a durable nature. Whenever he is filled with the tradesman-like anxiety of securing a moderate maintenance for himself, his wife, and children, there is an end of all improvement. We do not mean to say that the old age of deserving artists ought not to be provided for. But to those players who from age, illness, or other accidents, have lost their qualifications for acting, we ought to give pensions to induce them to leave off instead of continuing to play. In general we ought not to put it into the heads of the players, that they are such important and indispensable personages. Nothing is more rare than a truly great player; but nothing is more common than the qualifications for filling characters in the manner we generally see them filled: of this we may be convinced in every private theatre, in any thing like an intelligent circle. Finally, the relation which subsists with us between the managers of theatres and writers, is also as detrimental as possible. In France and England, the author of a piece has a determinate share of the profits of each representation; this procures for him a permanent income, whenever any of his pieces are so successful as to keep their place on the theatre. Again, if the piece is unsuccessful, he receives nothing. In Germany, the managers of theatres pay a certain sum beforehand, and at their own risk, for the manuscripts which they receive. They may thus be very considerable losers; and on the other hand, if the piece is extraordinarily successful, the author is not suitably rewarded.—*ATTOR.*

The Author is under a mistake with respect to the reward which falls to the share of the dramatic writer in England. He has not a part of the profits of each representation. If the play runs three nights, it brings him in as much as if it were to run three thousand nights.—*TRANS.*

Germans, by nature more a speculative than a practical people, led to this consequence, that works of art, and tragedies more especially, have been executed on abstract theories more or less misunderstood. It was natural that these tragedies should produce no effect on the theatre;—nay, they are in general unsusceptible of representation, and possess no inward life.

Others again have, with true feeling, appropriated the spirit of the ancient tragedians, and sought the most suitable manner of accommodating the simple and pure forms of art of antiquity to the constitution of our scene.

Men truly distinguished for their talents have attached themselves to the romantic drama, but they have generally taken it in a latitude which is only allowable in the romance, without concerning themselves with the compression which the dramatic form necessarily requires. Or they have seized only the musically fanciful and picturesquely sportive side of the Spanish dramas, without their firm keeping, their energetical power, and their theatrical effect.

What path shall we now enter? Shall we endeavour to re-acustom ourselves to the form of the French tragedy, which we have so long banished? Repeated experience has proved that, with every modification from the manner of translation and the tone of representation, as some modification is indispensable, even in the hands of a Goethe or a Schiller, it never can attain any great success.

✓ The genuine imitation of the Greek tragedy is more related to our way of thinking; but it is beyond the comprehension of the multitude, and must always remain a learned enjoyment of art for a few cultivated minds, like the contemplation of ancient statues.

In comedy, Lessing has already remarked the difficulty of introducing national manners which are not provincial, as the tone of social life with us is not modelled after a common central point. If we wish pure comedies, I would strongly recommend the use of rhyme; perhaps with the more artificial form they might also gradually assume a peculiarity of substance.

It appears to me, however, that this is not the most urgent want: let us first finish in a worthy manner the serious and higher species of the German character. In this it appears to me that our taste inclines altogether to the romantic. What most attracts the multitude in our half sentimental, half humorous dramas, which one moment transport us to Peru, and the next to Kam-schatka, and soon after into the times of chivalry, while the sentiments are all modern and lachrymose, is always a sprinkling

of the romantic, which we even recognize in the most insipid magical operas. The signification of this species has been lost with us before it was properly found; the fancy has passed with the inventors of such chimeras, and the views of the plays are sometimes wiser than those of their authors. In a hundred play-bills the name romantic is profaned by being lavished on rude and monstrous abortions; let us be permitted by criticism and history to elevate it again to its true signification. We have lately endeavoured in many ways to revive the remains of our old national poetry. These may afford the poet a foundation for the wonderful festival-play; but the most dignified species of the romantic is the historical.

In this field the noblest laurels may be reaped by those dramatic poets who wish to emulate Goethe and Schiller. Still, however, let our historical drama be in reality universally national; let it not attach itself to the life and adventures of single knights and petty princes, who had no influence on the whole nation. Let it at the same time be truly historical, drawn from a profound knowledge, and let us transport ourselves wholly back to the great times of old. In this glass let the poet enable us to see, though to our deep shame, what the Germans were in former times, and what they must again be. Let him impress it strongly on our hearts, that we Germans, if we do not consider the lessons of history better than we have hitherto done, are in danger,—we, formerly the first and most glorious people of Europe, whose freely elected Prince was acknowledged without opposition for the head of all Christendom—of disappearing altogether from their list of independent nations. The higher ranks, by their predilection for foreign manners, by their zeal for the mental cultivation of other nations, which must always yield a miserable fruit, transplanted from their natural climate into a hot-house, have long alienated themselves from the body of the people; still longer, for three centuries at least, has internal dissension consumed our noblest powers in civil wars, the ruinous consequences of which are now first beginning to disclose themselves. May all who have an opportunity of influencing the public mind exert themselves to extinguish at last the old misunderstanding, and to rally all the well-disposed round the objects of reverence which have unfortunately been abandoned; (but by true attachment to which our forefathers acquired so much happiness and renown), as round a consecrated banner, and to let them feel their indestructible unity as Germans! What a picture is afforded by our history from the most remote times, the wars with the Romans down to the fixed formation of the

German empire! Then the chivalrously brilliant interval of the house of Hohenstaufen, and lastly, what is of more political importance, and more nearly concerns us, of the house of Hapsburg, which has produced so many great princes and heroes. What a field for a poet who, like Shakspeare, could discern the poetical side of the great events of the world! But we, Germans, take always so little interest in our most important national affairs, that even the mere historical exhibition of these great events is still very far behind.

THE END.